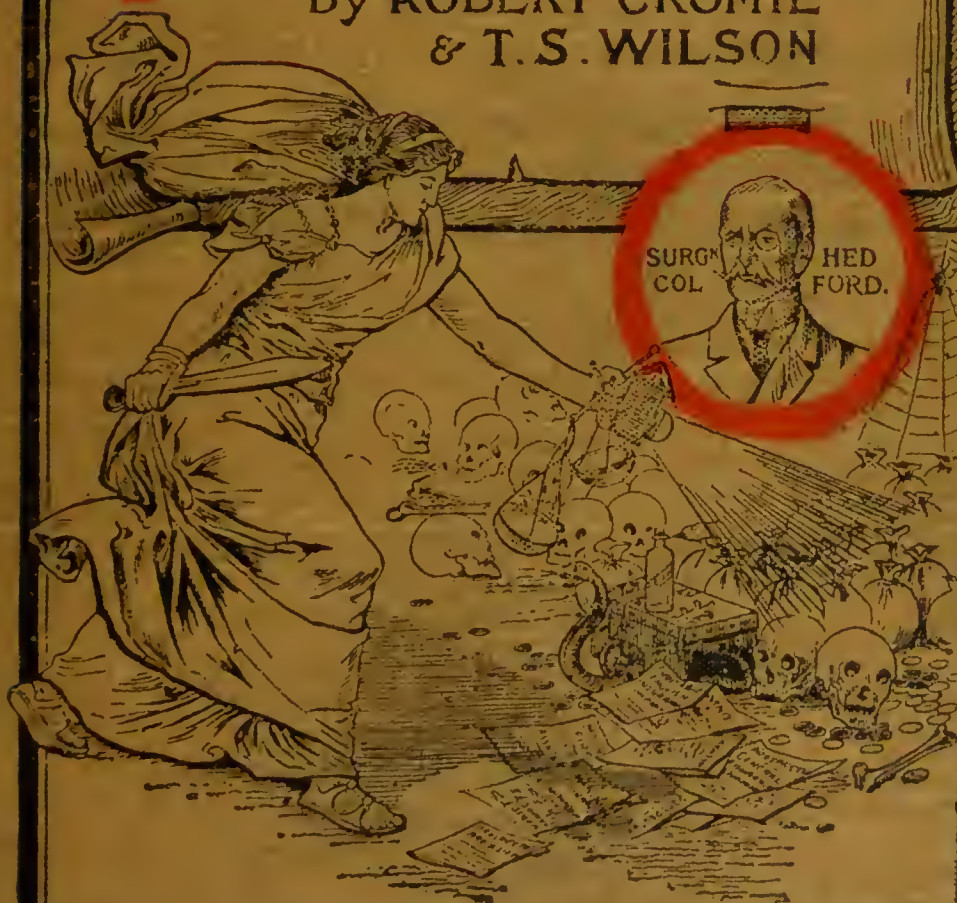


THE ROMANCE OF POISONS

By ROBERT CROMIE
& T. S. WILSON



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THE
ROMANCE OF POISONS

BEING
WEIRD EPISODES FROM LIFE

BY
ROBERT CROMIE

*Author of "The Crack of Doom," "A Plunge into Space,"
"The Lost Liner," "A New Messiah," etc., etc.*

IN COLLABORATION WITH
T. S. WILSON

SANS PEUR ET
SANS REPROCHE



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THE ROMANCE OF POISONS.

I.—A MODERN BORGIA.

SURGEON-COLONEL JOHN HEDFORD, late of the Indian Medical Service, lived in the large provincial city of Salchester. During a long residence in India he had given much time and study to the action of poisons on organic life. His knowledge of the subject became so exhaustive that, had he lived in the time of the Borgias, the lucrative appointment of Court Poisoner would have been his. As it was, however, his speciality enabled him to supplement his income by acting as an expert when called on. His book on Toxicology, which he modestly entitled "Some Remarks on the Nature and Effect of Indian Poisons," had been favourably reviewed by the *Lancet* and the *British Medical Journal* and bade fair to become a text-book in the schools.

One morning he was watching the death-throes of a mouse to which he had administered a new ptomaine, when a letter, marked "Immediate," was delivered by a commissionaire. It read as follows:

"The Royal Standard Life

Assurance Co.,

24, Castle Lane, Salchester,

12th July, 18—.

DEAR SIR,

Can you favour us with a call at this office at 12 o'clock to-day? We wish to consult you on a matter of great importance. Kindly reply per messenger.

Yours very truly,

CHAS. B. MORTON,

Resident Secretary.

Surgeon-Col. J. Hedford,

Queen's Elms, Salchester."

The Specialist in Poisons read the note carefully through twice before sending an affirmative reply. By this time the mouse was dead, and as that was the only urgent business he had on hand just then, Hedford suspended his experiments for the day.

His silver-mounted cane and immaculate Lincoln-and-Bennett were handed to him by his Hindoo servant, Chundra-Dass, and Hedford left the house. He sauntered leisurely to the County Club. After skimming over a few of that morning's London dailies, he went to the offices of the "Royal Standard," where he arrived with military punctuality on the stroke of noon.

Hedford was received by the Secretary, Mr. Morton, and introduced to Mr. Montagu Scott, the London manager, who had been in Salchester for some days. After paying a well-merited compliment to the Specialist on his reputation as a toxicologist, Mr. Scott got to business at once, and said abruptly:

"I am going to put a case into your hands which has cost this and two other companies, the 'Tresham' and the 'Mutual,' £150,000, and may cost us half-a-million unless we can discover how we are defrauded. We are satisfied that we are being defrauded."

The Specialist was reticent.

"Before handing you these documents," Mr. Scott went on, indicating a tightly-strapped bundle of papers on the table, "I must ask your earnest

assurance that you will maintain absolute secrecy on the subject until you yourself, or some other man, has solved the mystery."

The assurance given, Mr. Scott stated briefly that for the past two years purchases of life policies had been made by, or for, Sir William Huntingdon, M.P., a Salchester magnate of high reputation, who lived principally in London; that most of the persons assured had died since the date of the transfer of the policies; that in only one case had there been an inquest, for the sufficient reason that the assured had all died from well-known diseases, and had been attended by physicians who were beyond suspicion; and that the three companies had paid claims amounting in all to £150,000 either to Sir William Huntingdon or to persons who were suspected of being in collusion with him.

This coincidence of early death from "natural causes" occurring to nearly all the unfortunate transferrers of the policies was, at present, inexplicable. Mr. Scott had no special hypothesis, but, on behalf of the three "Life" offices, he entrusted Surgeon-Colonel Hedford with the case, informing him that if necessary he might call in the services of an experienced detective from Scotland Yard.

This Hedford declined to do, preferring to work for a time single-handed in the matter. Mr. Scott intimated that a sum of £500 would be placed to the credit of Colonel Hedford's account in the Great Northern Banking Company, and that he was to spare neither pains nor money in the endeavour to clear up the mystery.

As the Specialist left the "Royal Standard" office, he buttoned his coat with determination and strode hastily homeward. He was well aware of the intricate nature of the task before him, and fully realised the difficulties in his path. On the other hand, the fact that the £500 would convert the small debit balance of his banking account into a moderate credit one was a matter for satisfaction. Anglo-Indian habits are expensive and difficult to break off. Besides, the work before him was purely humanitarian. It is pleasant to be a philanthropist when one is well paid for it.

On arriving at "The Elms," Hedford went straight to his study, and lighting a strong Indian cheroot, he undid the straps which bound together the bundle of documents handed to him by the manager of the Insurance Company. They were records of the dates and causes of death of the

persons whose policies had been purchased by Sir William Huntingdon. As the causes of death ranged from "small-pox" to "old-age," and, as the melancholy list included two railway accidents, very little was gained from the study of the papers. However, the Specialist made a table of their contents, which, when carefully completed, seemed to suggest something more than the individual documents read consecutively. On the impression thus formed he reserved judgment.

Surgeon-Colonel Hedford spent the next three weeks in journeying north, south, east, and west, to the different parts of the kingdom where the deceased policy-holders had resided. He interviewed doctors and relatives with much tact and circumspection, without arousing the slightest suspicion as to his object, but failed to elicit anything material. Death in each case had been caused by one or other of the ills to which the flesh is heir. The mystery was as far from solution as ever.

One terrible fact, however, stood out in ghastly relief—sooner or later after the purchase of the policies people who lived hundreds of miles apart were struck down by some deadly disease, and in several cases not only had the assured persons been

cut off, but also other members of their families. Hedford had seen strange things in India, and had heard of stranger. He was the reverse of superstitious, but he could not help feeling that there was more than coincidence in the matter, and at times those weird Eastern myths would persistently present themselves and point to Sir William Huntingdon as possessed of powers of a diabolical and horrible nature.

The Specialist, however, was both sensible and scientific. To be both scientific and sensible is to orthodox minds an impossibility. As Hedford possessed a happy combination of these qualities, he dismissed his wild fancies. Had he been less determined he would have given up the case in despair. He was on the point of returning to Salchester, when he received a telegram from Mr. Montagu Scott, as follows :

“To Hedford, Mitre Hotel, Manchester.

Policy purchased by Huntingdon yesterday, ten thousand pounds. See advertisement *Daily Telegraph* fifteenth inst. Hamilton staying Grand Hotel, Brighton. Letter awaits you there.

SCOTT, LONDON.”

Reference to the columns of the *Daily Telegraph* showed that a policy on the life of a retired Indian officer had been sold by auction the previous day.

The Specialist in Poisons arrived at Brighton tired out with continuous travelling. He found the letter from the "Royal Standard" awaiting him. The policy had been effected ten years previously in that office, and the assured was Major-General Hamilton, late Political Agent at the Court of the Rajah of Gorakphur. He had been unfortunate in a recent gold-mining speculation and had lost a large fortune. Hence the sale of the policy.

Hedford was intensely interested. After removing the traces of his tiresome journey he sent in his card to General Hamilton. They were old friends, and over a cigar and a whisky-and-seltzer in the smoking-room, Hamilton related the story of his misfortunes. He had still his pension and a small remnant of his capital left; but he bitterly regretted having had to let his life policy go. His daughters were to join him the next day and, in the course of a week, they intended going to some cheap Continental watering-place. The girls did not know of their father's financial difficulties, and Hedford was cautioned not to divulge anything to them.

The Misses Hamilton arrived the next morning and renewed acquaintance with Hedford, who laughingly reminded them that, when he bade them farewell ten years before at the Gorakphur Residency they had shed tears at his departure and had been lavish of their caresses. He told them that he hoped by "strict attention to business," &c., to merit a continuance, or rather a renewal, of the favours then bestowed. For a brief space he forgot his serious mission, and, in the society of Ethel and Mary Hamilton and their father, a very pleasant morning was spent. But he did not long neglect his duty, and that evening the Hamiltons saw him off by the London express. He had arranged to accompany the party to Dresden on his return from town.

That night Hedford had a conversation with Mr. Montagu Scott, and subsequently a more lengthy interview with the celebrated Inspector Trowbrigg, of South American fame, formerly of Scotland Yard, but now a "Private Enquiry Agent." The two left London together for Salchester by the night mail.

Two days afterwards Hedford and Chundra-

Dass, with many travelling trunks and port-manteaus, returned to Brighton. After a week spent by the party in making preparations for departure, it was arranged that they should cross by Dover and Calais next day.

Hedford retired to bed after an enjoyable evening, feeling relief in the thought that his old friend was fleeing from the mysterious fate which might befall him at any moment. He spent a troubled night. Distracting thoughts kept him awake, and he only fell into a sound sleep towards morning. He was awakened by Chundra-Dass, whose usually dusky countenance was of an ashen pallor.

"Supplied General Sahib his 'Chotahazri,'" he stammered with chattering teeth. "Sahib very bad. Him one dam rash all over."

Jumping out of bed Hedford threw on his dressing-gown and, followed by Chundra-Dass, rushed to the General's bedroom.

The sword had fallen!

"What do you think is the matter, Hedford?" the General asked anxiously. "I don't half like this rash on my face and wrists. I feel as if I've been peppered by small shot."

"I don't like it either," said Hedford gravely, after a careful examination of his patient.

"What have I got?"

"Small-pox."

"My God!—the poor girls!"

Major-General Hamilton died, and was duly buried.

The Specialist might have made a "post-mortem" privately if he had wished. But the General had died of small-pox, and there was an end of it. Besides, Hedford had abandoned the poison theory. He had entered a *cul-de-sac*.

On the day after the funeral, Hedford, at Ethel Hamilton's request, went over the deceased's papers. He was struck by the number of gold and silver-mine prospectuses which poor Hamilton had accumulated. As he tossed them one after another into the waste-paper basket, he observed some pencil memoranda, in the General's handwriting, on a prospectus from which the wrapper had *not* been removed. The Dullwitch postmark caught his eye. This struck him as odd. Prospectuses are not usually posted in small country villages a hundred miles from London. He turned out the contents of the basket on the floor, and found

several torn wrappers, which he minutely examined. Then taking from his pocket-book the reports of Ex-Inspector Trowbrigg, which he had received from day to day, he perused them with concentrated attention. A dozen wild guesses passed through his mind, but none stood the test of "second thought." One shadowy idea then began to form, wilder and more horrible still than all the rest ; so far-fetched, indeed, that he dismissed it. But it returned again and again. He fought against it no further. He would go to Dullwitch. A short telegram was despatched to Trowbrigg.

Hedford explained to the two girls that he was summoned away for a few days on business of the most urgent nature. Before leaving, he handed to Ethel Hamilton a twenty-pound bank-note which he had found in the General's writing-desk. Owing to the fact that he had placed it there himself, it is not surprising that he had found it. The Specialist was a kindly man, although a vivisectionist.

The next evening Hedford arrived at Dullwitch. He was met at the station by Trowbrigg. Dullwitch is a small country village on the Great Northern line, some seven or eight miles from the large manufacturing town of Starlington.

The detective took much interest in the postal arrangements of the village. Surgeon-Colonel Hedford had apparently no other object in life than golfing, to which fascinating game he devoted himself with great energy. He got to know many of the golfers.

On the third morning of his stay in Dullwitch, he was met on the links by Trowbrigg, who took from his pocket a newspaper, the *Starlington News Letter*, and pointed to a paragraph marked in blue pencil:—“Dullwitch Hospital. — Sir William Huntingdon, M.P. for Starlington, has forwarded a cheque for £500 to the treasurer of the Dullwitch Hospital. If other Life Governors would follow his princely example, the Institution's debt would soon be cleared off. Sir William Huntingdon's frequent visits to the wards testify ——”

Hedford read no more. The hospital was situated at the outskirts of the village. He went there without delay. The house-physician, Dr. Grey, another ardent golfer, gratefully received his modest subscription of five pounds. Dr. Grey was much pleased with the interest in the hospital shown by Colonel Hedford—an interest natural

enough in a brother medical man—and cordially invited him to inspect the wards.

After the tour of the hospital, Hedford said carelessly, "What about your cases of infectious disease?"

"Splendidly isolated—a separate building," Grey explained. "Like to go through?"

"Yes, if I may."

"Most of our infectious cases are sent to us from Starlington," Dr. Grey said, as they crossed the quadrangle to a row of isolated huts. "We have several bad cases of typhus and small-pox at present. Is it wise though, on your part, to run any risk? You are not on duty, you know."

"Oh," said Hedford with a quiet smile, "I am disease-proof. I have seen too much of that sort of thing in India to have the least fear. You can disinfect me afterwards."

Nurse Hudson was on duty—a tall, expressionless woman, who answered Dr. Grey's questions in a direct, business-like manner. Nurse Hudson was reported to have private means.

"Splendid woman, but too unsympathetic," Dr. Grey whispered in Hedford's ear.

Nurse Hudson looked keenly at the visitor,

who, in an apparently careless manner, was inspecting a patient's clinical chart, which hung on the wall beside the bed. The remarks on the chart were in Nurse Hudson's handwriting.

"Very interesting case this," said the doctor, joining Hedford.

"How is Johnston?" This to Nurse Hudson.

"Much better, doctor," the nurse replied hastily.

"Must have been bad then," Hedford put in.

"The man is comatose now, or dead."

Dr. Grey drew down the bed-clothes and felt the patient's heart.

Nurse Hudson turned very white.

"He is dead," said the doctor, re-arranging the bed-clothes.

The visitor's keen eye noticed something lying beside the body. He placed his hand on the dead man's heart and possessed himself of the object unobserved by the nurse. The nature of Huntingdon's crime flashed upon him. His surmise had become a certainty!

Hedford took leave of Dr. Grey hastily. Five minutes afterwards Detective Trowbrigg interviewed Nurse Hudson. The interview was short, sharp, and decisive. She obtained leave of

absence. A near relative was dying she said. For one hour exactly she was closeted with Colonel Hedford in his private sitting-room at the Red Lion.

The Specialist caught the first train to London. His brain was on fire. He could not sit still in his corner of the compartment. He could not read. He could not even smoke, and he told a civil curate of the "Private Secretary" type, who said it was a "charming day," to go to the devil.

When the train drew into Euston he could hardly wait for it to stop. He dashed out of the carriage, jumped into a hansom, and drove rapidly to the head office of the "Royal Standard," where he found Mr. Montagu Scott awaiting him. The Manager had been warned by wire.

"You have succeeded," said Mr. Scott, strongly agitated, as Hedford entered the room, "I see it in your face!"

Hedford produced an oblong-shaped paper which bore evident traces of having been submitted to the action of some strong chemical agent. It was a prospectus of the "African Exploration, Trading and Mining Company, Limited." It was addressed to

*"Henry Hewstead, Esq.,
11, Granville Terrace,
Belfast."*

Hedford read out the name and address. "Is he a policy-holder in your Company?" he asked.

The Manager touched an electric bell and spoke through a tube. The sharp r-r-ing of the bell broke the silence, and Mr. Montagu Scott applied his ear to the tube.

"In difficulties—life assured for £2,000. Policy sold six months ago to Sir William Huntingdon," said the Manager as he dropped the flexible tube.

"Wonderful, marvellous, monstrous, fiendish!" he added, five minutes later. "What will you do now?"

"Pardon me," answered the Specialist, "what will *you* do now?"

Mr. Scott pondered for some minutes, and then said slowly and impressively:

"I think, Colonel Hedford, you had better finish this yourself. We have lost an immense sum of money. It would suit us to get it back. This should be a bonus year, and I don't see how we

are going to pay it. *We* cannot compound with the scoundrel. Your circumstantial evidence is still very weak; it might hang the woman, but that would not enable the 'Royal Standard' and the other two Companies to recover their money. You may be certain the villain Huntingdon has his retreat secured."

"To cut the matter short," said Hedford deliberately," you will leave the matter in my hands."

Mr. Montagu Scott looked straight into the other's eyes, and said slowly:

"That is the only way. I will leave it in your hands."

"Then you will pay your bonus," said the Specialist.

"And you five thousand pounds," said the Managing Director.

Sir William Huntingdon turned over carelessly a visiting card bearing this inscription:

*"Surgeon-Col. J. Hedford,
(Late Indian Medical Service),
United Service Club,
Pall Mall."*

"Show him up," he said, and the Specialist in poisons entered the room.

"Your business, sir?" said the Baronet shortly. Hedford had neither bowed nor accepted Sir William's outstretched hand.

"To make you an offer."

"About what?"

"Some 'Royal Standard' and other life policies you hold."

"Sir, your intrusion is most unwarrantable. My secretary transacts business of that nature for me. Good day!" Sir William moved towards the bell. The Specialist interposed.

"Will your secretary go so far as to hang for you if we prove our case?"

"Your case—what case? Are you mad, or drunk?"

"Neither. I am here to tell you, firstly," said the Specialist, checking off his items on the fingers of one hand, "that you have swindled three insurance companies out of £150,000; secondly, that, with one or two exceptions, you have murdered all the policy-holders who sold to you; and, thirdly, that you carried out this system of prodigious crime by means of your accomplice——"

"That will do. Leave the house!" Sir William commanded. The muscles of his face never moved, but it was death-like in its pallor.

"But Nurse Hudson?"

"Never heard of her."

"Strange! She knows you well."

"How should that concern me?"

"She is in custody. She has confessed."

Sir William Huntingdon sank back in his chair.

Half an hour afterwards Hedford, accompanied by the Baronet, drove to the Bank of England. Some mysterious operations took place there which resulted in the transfer of a large sum in Consols to "John Hedford."

They drove back to Park Lane. The Specialist remained about ten minutes. He then left the house, walked away a few paces down the street and stopped. This is what he was saying to himself:

"One hundred and fifteen thousand pounds. A hundred thousand for the insurance people, ten for the Hamilton girls, and five for myself. No proceedings, no trouble, no chance of losing the pile, and all on condition of allowing the beast to blow——"

The bang of a pistol-shot rang out on the stillness of the aristocratic street.

A small group of people began to gather round Sir William Huntingdon's door.

Surgeon-Colonel John Hedford called a cab.

Nurse Hudson's body was found in the Thames, a week afterwards.

No more typhus or small-pox infected prospectuses were posted in Dullwitch.

II.—IN THE CAPTAIN'S ROOM.

THE North German liner "Kaiser Wilhelm III." built at Bremerhaven, was three days out on her maiden voyage to New York. Fine weather, for the depth of winter, had been experienced, and the speed maintained proved that the vessel was a good one although "Made in Germany." The passenger list was large considering that the "Kaiser Wilhelm III." had sailed on December 21st, not a popular date for leaving one's home, much less one's country. On Christmas Eve the celebrations on board were very enthusiastic, and here and there in quiet corners rather pathetic. The saloon was effectively decorated, and two Christmas-trees had been creditably manufactured. But the excitement culminated when Captain Stein proposed "*Der Vaterland*," on which all loyal Germans shouted "Hoch!" and drank more champagne than was good for them.

Surgeon-Colonel Hedford had not been prominent in the amusements of the voyage, and the taciturn person who accompanied him in most of his deck rambles had been conspicuous by his absence. But on Christmas Eve all recalcitrants had been beaten up and every available man had been requisitioned to contribute something to the sum of the general happiness. After a dance on deck — the dancers well wrapped — had been successfully accomplished owing to the steadiness of the vessel, the motion of which was almost imperceptible, a concert was given in the saloon. "*Stille Nacht heilige Nacht*" was well received, but by the time it was sung Hedford and his friend thought they had done enough in the way of contributing their company to the audience, and so they slipped away quietly.

They were making for the smoke-room when the Doctor met them with an invitation from the Captain to adjourn to his room. Captain Stein had only invited Hedford, but the Doctor could not well avoid including Hedford's friend, more especially as he had noticed the pair so constantly together. When they came on deck they found that a sudden change for the worse had taken

place in the weather. The night, which had been very mild, was now bitterly cold. A fine snow was falling. The masts, ropes, boats, and deck-houses were white. The whole vessel had been metamorphosed into a spectre ship gliding with even motion over a jet black sea. Captain Stein had already a guest when they entered his room. This man, a Hungarian named Andrassy, had, after a long residence in Chicago, become plain Anderson. He was a musical enthusiast, and a cultivator of the emotions generally. He was, therefore, a contrast to Hedford himself, and a marked contrast to Hedford's friend. Anderson became eloquent after the whisky and cigars had passed round twice. He was in the middle of a long-winded homily about the children and their Christmas-trees and their pretty little shoes, which would be filled with presents in the morning, when the Captain put in:

"I am glad the little ones had a good time this evening. They won't want much to eat to-morrow."

"Bad weather ahead?" Anderson asked with a trace of anxiety.

"Well—pretty bad. The glass has been falling

rapidly. We'll have a rough spell for a couple of days at any rate. That's why I put so much of to-morrow's programme into to-night's bill. We are more likely to be battened down to-morrow than dancing on deck, I can tell you."

Captain Stein spoke English with scarcely a trace of foreign accent, and he had also mastered the vernacular of our mariners, as many a lazy Briton who had sailed with him found out. Anderson crossed his legs uneasily. Hedford and his friend puffed leisurely at their cigars. The Doctor was equally placid.

"By the way," the Captain said to Hedford, "I did not quite catch your friend's name when you introduced him."

"Pardon me," Hedford replied, "Mr. —" with a jerk—"Smith."

Mr. Smith did not assist the conversation much. He was a wet blanket of the worst description. Stein vainly tried a few anecdotes, but they fell flat. Only one of the party—naturally, his own officer, the Doctor—was able to laugh at his famous joke. It was a fine old seafaring joke too. It had crossed the Atlantic many times.

"Come, come, Hedford," the Captain said at

last. "It is Christmas Eve. Tell us a good story. You are a mine of anecdote and a prince of storytellers. Pass the decanter, and spin us a yarn."

"Tell them about Henrik Ibbetsen," said the silent Smith—whose other name was Trowbrigg. "That's a proper yarn for a Christmas Eve. Give 'em the shivers if they want 'em."

Hedford shook his head, but Smith's proposal was immediately seconded and unanimously passed, the emotional man being very pressing. The Surgeon-Colonel gave way in consequence and prepared to commence his story. His preparation was somewhat curious. He first opened the cabin door and looked out. Then he locked it on the inside, and turning to his audience said seriously :

"Gentlemen, I must ask you upon your honour to keep secret what I am about to tell you."

They assured him that he might depend upon them, so he began immediately in a quiet, impressive voice :

"It might do good to publish this story far and wide. On the other hand, its publication far or near might do incalculable injury to humanity——"

"That's a good start," the emotional man inter-

jected, as he settled himself more comfortably in his seat.

"It's a cholera story——"

"I shall like this," the Doctor grunted, cramming a handful of tobacco into the immense bowl of his meerschaum and lighting it hastily. Hedford commenced his tale.

"I had got some credit over a life assurance case, which at the outset was supposed to require the assistance of a toxicological expert, and I had seen some cholera service in India; so when the dreadful epidemic broke out in Biedenburg, I was not surprised to receive an urgent letter from an old friend of mine, Dr. Müller, then at the head of the Biedenburg Board of Health. I joined him at his own request and that of the Board of which he was an administrator. He had been winning golden opinions for his work ever since the disease had broken out, and certainly from the time of my arrival if ever a man fought an epidemic out to the bitter end with every weapon known to science that man was Müller. My own work, however, did not lie much in a line with Müller's, for while he and the other doctors were doing all that men could

to stamp out the epidemic, my business was to inquire into its origin.

"You remember that one curious phase was noticed—the type was pure Asiatic cholera, but the connecting link by which it had been introduced was lost, or rather never had been found. You may imagine the difficulties in my way when you think of the immense number of deaths which had occurred before I came to the city. In some cases whole families had been exterminated without any proper record of their symptoms or treatment having been kept. Then the shipping in the harbour had, in the early stages of the disease, been very loosely looked after. The task before me appeared impossible, and, as a matter of fact, it turned out impossible. I made no headway——"

"That's the first of the wind," Captain Stein interrupted, as a soft moan sounded without. "Excuse me, Colonel; go on with your story. You did not give up, I'll swear."

"No, but I might nearly as well have done so. At Müller's request, I made the acquaintance of the girl to whom he was engaged. She was English, a Miss Brentwich. Müller would not go near the house in which she lived, dreading the possibility

of bringing the contagion with him. This extreme caution I set down to nervous strain from overwork; for surely Müller should have been aware that it is almost impossible to transmit cholera in such a manner. But then he had no time to think out the everlasting problem of the union of the soil-microzymes and the cholera-microzymes, or to settle the question in his own mind, so far as his own conduct for the moment was concerned, whether cholera is or is not a miasmatic-contagious disease. He left all that to a more convenient season, and meantime ran no risks. Indeed, he only wrote to Miss Brentwich when absolutely necessary, and he had given her elaborate instructions as to disinfecting every object, great or small, that reached the house from without.

“Miss Brentwich was a handsome girl, and I have no doubt, that under ordinary circumstances, I should have found her society agreeable. But she was very depressed, and it was too evident that she only tolerated me on account of the news I brought her from the pestilential seat of war. There was a romantic story about her engagement. She had, owing to her pretty face, splendid figure, perfect manner, and admirable banking account—

to mention her attractions in the cumulative climax to which the average man is amenable—a large circle of admirers. In the process of natural selection these had been eventually reduced to three: George Morrison, English; Henrik Ibbetsen, Dutch; and Wilhelm Müller, German. Müller, when he found that he had only secured third place in the struggle for existence in the good graces of Miss Brentwich, quietly withdrew and devoted himself to his profession. But Ibbetsen, a well-known pathologist and a rising man, did not yield so readily to a mere sporting English gentleman. Up to this time no actual proposal had been made, but everyone knew that Morrison had only to ask and he would receive—that is, be accepted.

“George Morrison was in the first batch of cholera victims. He was skilfully and chivalrously attended to the last by Müller. On the outbreak of the epidemic, Ibbetsen had shut himself up in his house, and saw no one. His conduct was considered strange and cowardly. Miss Brentwich knew of this and, although in great grief, she accepted Müller out of gratitude. As to marriage, Müller had no time to think of that. His hands

were full. Most of these details I got from a Mrs. Selwyn, who lived with Miss Brentwich, both as a paid companion and a near relative. The widow had an ear for gossip, and would have made an excellent correspondent for a society paper if she had not already found a more desirable post. Shut up as she was, it was extraordinary how much she seemed to know about the daily lives of the Biedenburg people. This knowledge she was always ready to impart. The gabble about Ibbetsen struck me as really very strange. A man like him was badly wanted in the hospitals, and in the huts. He had been a fearless practitioner, and never counted his own life when science or humanity required his services. And the strangest part of the gossip was the fact that the complete change in Ibbetsen's whole nature was exactly contemporaneous with the outbreak of the cholera. On that I formed a theory and acted on it. I determined to interview the man, no matter how rigidly he secluded himself. After some difficulty I did so.

"Ibbetsen's appearance was a startling surprise, I had heard of him as a man of iron nerve and of rigidly abstemious habits. I found him not only

a hopeless drunkard but a drugged drunkard. I have never experienced anything more painful than my visit to him. It is bad enough to be in the company of a man who is merely drunk. It is much worse to be in the company of a man who is in delirium for want of stimulants after a prolonged drinking bout. But Ibbetsen was practically in delirium tremens and deadly drunk as well. The combination is an ugly one.

"I gave him—you know," nodding to the physician of the "Kaiser Wilhelm," who had let his pipe out.

"Of course, you gave him——" the Doctor was cutting in with, when Hedford interposed. "This is not a clinical lecture, Doctor."

"I got him into bed and finally asleep, and considering his condition, I felt rather proud of my prescription. I then sent a message to my hotel to say that I would not return that night. This despatched, I rang for Ibbetsen's servant and directed him to sit in his master's bedroom and call me if any change took place in the condition of my patient. On that I lay down on a couch and fell asleep. I was awakened soon by a touch on the shoulder. It was Ibbetsen

himself who called me, and not his man. The servant had evidently gone to his own quarters. Ibbetsen was wide awake and partly rational. He talked incessantly. My business, of course, was to get him asleep again as soon as possible; but when the powerful medicine I had given him failed so soon I was puzzled how to act. Trying to occupy his mind and draw it away from exciting fancies, I said soothingly:

“‘Sit down here and let me tell you the news!’

“‘The news?’ he gasped. ‘Any more news?’

“‘No, no, it isn’t news. It is only about an appointment I have with Dr. Müller at the cholera hospital.’ I don’t know how I came to say that. It was a bad time to say it if I wanted to prove my theory, and on my own theory it must be absolutely destructive of my treatment.

“‘Cholera!’ he yelled. ‘Cholera!’

“With a bound he was on me. I had some trouble with him, for he was a powerful man. His nervous system was in a bad state, but his splendid physique had not had time to suffer permanently. I was obliged to use great violence, for there was no help near. I was fighting for my life. I got through with it at last, and

Ibbetsen lay back on the couch exhausted, and crying childishly.

“‘Cholera! Cholera!’ he sobbed. ‘All dead, all dead! The Englisher, Morrison, was a fine man. But he was the first to go.’ Then with a burst of fury he shouted:

“‘Where is the damned spy?’

“I slipped behind a screen.

“‘Hoch! Hoch!’ he maundered on. ‘That was a fine dinner-party. *Gott in Himmel* that was a brave dance of death. The mistake was they did not drink from skulls. There they are. Plenty of them! Skulls everywhere! Ach!’

“He stopped for a moment and then resumed. ‘I did not drink that night. But I have had a royal drink since.’

“‘Here’s to the first of the cholera men,’ he shouted, and, taking a bottle of brandy and a glass from a stand I had not previously noticed, he poured out a tumbler-full of raw spirit.

“‘To the Englisher, Morrison. The first of the cholera men!’ He said this slowly and deliberately as he raised the glass to his lips.

“I stepped from behind the screen in the hope of taking the brandy from him. The light of the

single gas jet was faint, but it showed me Ibbetsen's distorted face glaring in a mirror opposite. My own face was reflected close to his. There was a small space between. In that space it seemed to me that a slight film began to gather. My nerves had been wrought upon by what I had gone through. The film took shape—the shape of a face.

“‘It is the face of the Englisher,’ Ibbetsen said, in a low, steady voice. Then he drank off the brandy. Whirling his right hand suddenly round his head, he dashed the bottle, which he had been holding, at the mirror. It struck the glass in the centre and smashed it to atoms.

“‘Good night, Morrison,’ he said, in the same low voice, and fell back on the couch.

“The next day he was permanently insane.”

Anderson was now livid. Captain Stein had risen from his seat and stood bolt upright, with his head shot forward, a habit of his on the bridge when steaming full speed through a fog. The doctor hardly breathed. Outside, the wind was rising fast. The ship began to heave.

Hedford continued :

"Ibbetsen's laboratory was a wonderful place. I did not covet the man's condition, certainly, but I envied him his laboratory. I was a long time searching for what I wanted. I found it at last. It was a thick glass jar with a well-gelatined stopper, and labelled—but that would anticipate. Wait a moment (this to the Doctor, who was about to interrupt again).

"A few minutes with a microscope proved what I had expected.

"I left the house and went to my hotel. The grey dawn was brightening into day when I arrived. Notwithstanding the hour, Miss Brentwich was at the hotel. She was waiting for me. Her face, always wan and white, as I had seen it, wore a new horror. Some fresh blow had fallen.

"'He is down at last,' she gasped.

"'Müller!'

"'Yes. Human nature could stand the strain no longer. You will go to him. You will save the brave fellow. I cannot bear more than has already befallen me. I wish I were dead.'

"She said this without a tear. Her tears had all been shed.

"Müller was not past hope when I found him. But he thought he was. I believe I could have saved his life——"

Omnes: "Which of course you did!"

"Not I. I allowed him to die, as I might say, without benefit of clergy—that is, without even the alleviation of pain which science can in the last extremity provide.

"Wait!" cried Hedford sharply, for the faces of his hearers (excepting that of the imperturbable Mr. Smith) were glaring fiercely at him.

"In his terror of death, Müller told me the secret of the epidemic of Asiatic cholera in Biedenburg."

"Which you have told us?"

"Not yet."

"Great Scotland Yard!" Captain Stein interjected; "what's next?"

"This: Ibbetsen had given a dinner-party to his friends, including Müller and Morrison. The host had a special wine in his cellar which Müller knew that none of the guests drank save himself and the Englishman. Müller also knew all about the cholera bacilli-farm in the laboratory. He dosed the special wine, and at the last moment left to look after a pretended urgent case."

"What a fiendish joke!" cried the Captain and his officer. Neither Smith nor Anderson spoke.

"No," said Hedford, "that's the worst of it. It was not a joke; nor even an accident, as poor Ibbetsen thought, till the thinking of it drove him mad."

The wind was now whistling through the rigging. The Captain gave a hasty order without and closed the door of his room again with a bang.

"Müller believed," Hedford went on without noticing the interruption, "that he could confine the disease to one man, Morrison. And so he could. But it happened that, owing to some banter at the table, all the guests had drank the fatal wine. Ibbetsen would have done the same, only that, owing to a slight indisposition, he avoided stimulants that evening. Eleven out of the thirteen—a number which served for many a merry jest at table—who sat down developed Asiatic cholera within two days; some of them within a few hours. Their residences were widely scattered, and so the epidemic got ahead of Müller——"

A message was here delivered to the Captain. He apologized hoarsely to his guests and left the cabin. The others followed. When Stein returned

from the bridge he found his friends listening to the singing of an English anthem which could be faintly heard from the saloon. They were waiting for him. Snow was falling in blinding drifts.

Hedford said quietly :

"Müller indirectly killed many thousands whom he vainly tried to save ; but he did directly kill, and he meant to kill, one man, George Morrison."

Very softly from the saloon floated up the last line of the anthem,

"On earth, peace! Good will toward men!"

III.—THE ANTIDOTE.

CHRISTMAS DAY on board the "Kaiser Wilhelm III." was spent by her passengers as Captain Stein had prophesied. A strong gale blew all day, and there was a heavy cross sea. Most of the senior, and all the junior passengers, remained in their state-rooms, more or less prostrated by sea-sickness. The saloon was practically deserted. A few old hands sat at the Captain's table and worked their way steadily through the Christmas menu provided by the chief steward. But even they retired early, as the gale increased, and after dinner only two men met in the smoke-room—Surgeon-Colonel Hedford, and his friend "Mr. Smith."

Trowbrigg was dissatisfied. He wanted fuller information from his immediate employer, the toxicologist, and said so, with firmness as well as politeness. The success of their mission was in the opinion of the ex-detective imperilled by the

reticence of his chief. The chief believed in Trowbrigg to a certain extent, but in himself implicitly. He meant to place fuller confidence in his officer immediately, but thought the time was not ripe for the final interchange of views. Trowbrigg had been engaged to act with him, at his own suggestion, by the Royal Standard Life Assurance Company. That is, Trowbrigg was to obtain certain information, and having done so, he was to consider himself under Surgeon-Colonel Hedford's orders.

The desired information had been rather cleverly obtained by Trowbrigg. On its receipt, the "Royal Standard" had telegraphed to Hedford asking for an immediate interview. The result of this meeting was that Colonel Hedford had taken a special train to Southampton, and caught the "Kaiser Wilhelm III." sailing on her maiden voyage. Since the vessel sailed, Hedford and Trowbrigg had been working independently—each had been working independently—each pursuing his own line of investigation, with this difference, however, that while Trowbrigg reported daily to his chief, the chief kept his own counsel. Hence the interview in the smoke-room.

Hedford weighed the question of fuller confidence for a few moments, and decided that an unsatisfied subordinate is worse than none. He touched the bell, and a steward appeared, balancing himself in the doorway. The order was promptly supplied, notwithstanding the way the vessel pitched.

"Perhaps you are right," Hedford said, stirring a steaming tumbler of Glenlivet. "I intended to consult you to-morrow. But since you have mentioned it, I may as well do so now."

"The sooner the better," Trowbrigg said shortly.

"Quite so!" the Specialist in poisons agreed, ignoring the acerbity of the other's manner. "I shall now give you all the data on which we have to work, including the result of my observations since I came on board."

Trowbrigg shook his head negatively and said, "I am afraid we are on the wrong scent. In fact, I doubt if there is a true scent at all—at least on this ship. I think the 'Royal Standard' people are looking for a 'mare's nest.' What do you think of this? I suppose it represents the 'Royal Standard's' case." He laid a newspaper cutting on the table.

"From the *Social Gazetteer*, I should say by the type," Hedford remarked, taking up the printed slip. It read as follows :

"A ROMANCE OF THE PEERAGE.—Society was pleasantly agitated not long ago by the report that a well-known ex-cavalry officer had wedded an American beauty, whose face was by no means her only fortune. It appears that Lord —— had, during his short but merry career in the —— Hussars, run through the large fortune which he inherited in his mother's right. He was also deeply in debt, in addition to having exhausted both his father's patience and ready-money. His resignation was accepted without remonstrance by the authorities. When it was announced that the fortunate young nobleman and his millionaire wife would probably stop a few days at the Balham on their way through Town, Society bestirred itself to welcome the happy pair. But they did not break their journey, going straight from Liverpool to the seat of his lordship's father in Downshire. The head of the noble house had meantime withdrawn his resignation of the county hounds, and a famous architect had been entrusted with the design for a new wing to the Castle."

"The usual Society drive!" Hedford said, looking up, "and of no value."

"Read on," Trowbrigg remarked drily.

Hedford resumed: "When the noble Earl discovered that his son, so far from marrying an heiress, had taken to wife a waitress from a beer-garden in Chicago, his indignation at the folly of the bridegroom and the cupidity of the bride can be better imagined than described. A stormy interview between father and son resulted in the prompt expulsion from the Castle of the soi-disant heiress and her husband. Now comes the strange part of the story. A week after the expulsion of the prodigal son and his wife, it was announced in the evening papers that Lord —— had effected a policy on his life with the Royal Standard Life Assurance Company for £80,000. This is not the highest on record, but it was considered worth paragraphing. There was consternation at the Castle in Downshire on receipt of this news. The prodigal had really returned with an American heiress, and unhappily the rich had been sent empty away. No telegram or letter found them. They had disappeared. The burning question is, what object had Lord —— in raising, or in

refusing to deny, the waitress story? Is the fair American a millionairess or an adventuress? One thing at least is certain, Lady —— is a beautiful woman. Her portrait, which has appeared in the illustrated papers, was greatly admired."

"Well," said Trowbrigg, "does that throw any fresh light on the case?"

"Not much—I mean none whatever."

"Is it correct?"

"It is, so far as it goes. The truth is, the 'Royal Standard' people had no suspicions whatever until the waitress story got about. On hearing it, they cabled to Chicago, and found it to be true; but everything else was satisfactory. The premium had been paid by a cheque on Rich and Co., who further reported his lordship to the 'Royal Standard's' Bankers to be 'good for a thousand.' A fortnight later the policy was transferred to the principal of a firm of German money-lenders in London. That was the first incident in the case which could be regarded as disquieting. The company became suspicious. You were commissioned to find Lord Frederick. The Manager sent for me. Your telegram saying that his lordship was on board the 'Kaiser Wilhelm' was

handed to Mr. Scott while I was in his private office. I left London within an hour, and just managed to catch the ship at Southampton."

Here the consultation was interrupted by the entrance of the ship's doctor.

"I have been looking for you, Colonel," he said, with an apology for his intrusion. "The child of the gipsy woman is in *articulo mortis*. I wish you would look at it with me."

Hedford willingly consented, for it was an interesting case. On their way to the second-class state-room, in which the child was lying, they met the chief-engineer. He was going to the captain. His face was full of disappointment.

"Bearings heated. About to go 'half-speed,'" he said, as he passed. In a few minutes the engines were slowed. The change in the vessel's motion was instantly felt. All the passengers who could raise themselves tumbled out of their berths and hurried on deck. The officers were profuse in explanation and assurance. But the passengers were not entirely convinced. "Half-speed" in mid-ocean is unpleasantly suggestive.

Dr. Leibritch and Hedford were meanwhile examining the gipsy's child. It was a bad case of

diphtheria. There was only one chance for the child's life—the operation that has cost the life of many a brave warrior of the lancet. Hedford ventured it. The child lived and Hedford suffered no ill results.

When Dr. Leibritch told the gipsy woman what had been done, she overwhelmed the saviour of her child with passionate gratitude. In consequence he would have ceased to visit the patient but for one vague impression which he could neither explain nor dispel. Leibritch, it appeared, had given the gipsy a somewhat glowing account of the world-famed toxicologist. Hedford's impression was that the woman appeared genuinely grateful, but that there was more than gratitude in her importunity. This impression was ultimately justified. The woman's husband was a man named Hofer. He was the leader of a Hungarian Gipsy Band going out to fill an engagement in Chicago. The band had been in America some years before, and had made money. They played mostly in beer-gardens and music-halls.

Hofer was a dark, saturnine man of forbidding countenance, but a thorough musician. At Andrassy's suggestion this band had played in the

saloon each evening of the voyage. The music was usually too weird and eerie to be quite pleasant, but it was always fascinating. It suited Andrassy exactly. Second-class passengers were admitted to these concerts. Hofer's wife thus knew that Colonel Hedford was on friendly terms with Lord and Lady Erskine. He was constantly in their society. She formed a resolution which was rather heroic, considering the man to whom she was married and the man by whom they were both employed. She would tell Colonel Hedford what she knew about Lord Frederick Erskine and the man Andrassy.

The voyage was greatly protracted owing to the partial disablement of the machinery. One morning Lady Erskine appeared on deck without her husband. This was unusual. Hedford went to her and inquired for Lord Frederick with some anxiety.

"He is far from well," her Ladyship answered nervously. "He has been suffering from sore throat for the last week, but thought it would pass away. Yesterday he did not leave his room, and this morning he is much worse. I am going to ask Dr. Leibritch to see him again."

While she was speaking, Hedford watched the girl closely, in spite of his own excitement. It was quite evident that she was in real distress, and that if she had been a waitress in a beer-garden she had not suffered in manner.

"I will find the Doctor for you," Hedford said; "and if you would not mind I should like to see Lord Frederick also."

"I should be very glad if you would," she answered gratefully. "You are always kind. You are our only friend."

"Andrassy?"

"For God's sake do not speak of him—as a friend I mean."

There was a hysterical ring in her voice that Hedford did not miss.

"Yet you seem to know him very well."

"Yes—too well. But you will bring the Doctor immediately and come with him. I must go back to my husband. He does not like me to be long away."

Lord Frederick was suffering from a difficulty in breathing, due to laryngeal obstruction, and had a choking sensation frequently. Hedford, after a careful examination, approved of Leibritch's treat-

ment, and thought that in a few days the trouble would be over. But the next day Lord Frederick was much worse. His face had assumed a painfully careworn expression owing to the muscles of extraordinary respiration having been called into play. He had no febrile symptoms, but his dyspnœa had increased. Both Leibritch and Hedford examined the patient with the laryngoscope and found that a growth had rapidly invaded the larynx and lower part of the pharynx. This growth had no resemblance to membrane. The tissues were hypertrophied, and the disease now extended down the trachea.

The invasion was by a minute fungus which was new to both examiners. They were beaten. The man must die.

A steward knocked at the state-room door. He had a message for Colonel Hedford. The woman Hofer wanted to see him on a matter of life and death. The steward was positive about the woman's fright.

Hedford left the state-room, and was absent a few minutes. His usually impassive face was a study when he returned. Suppressed excitement shook him. His first exclamation startled Dr.

Leibritch into an output of long Teutonic words.

“Lord Frederick has been poisoned!”

The poor wife would have screamed out, but for Hedford's warning gesture.

“Not a word—not a sound!” Then speaking to Leibritch, Hedford said hurriedly, “The woman, Hofer, out of gratitude—that operation on the child, you remember!—swears he has been poisoned with an obscure fungus known to their band. She dare not say by whom. She has given me the antidote. The disease is not recognised by the faculty. She says you will remember a similar case on the ‘Heckla.’”

“I heard about it,” Leibritch said, strongly agitated. “But I myself was ill on the voyage and did not see the later stages of the case. The man was buried at sea.”

“Then shall we risk this?” Hedford held up a small phial. There was no label on it. It had little or no smell. The doctors could make nothing of it. Leibritch hung back. He did not like to advise. Lady Erskine, pale to the lips, and looking at Hedford with pathetic indecision, said:

“I was kind to the woman, too. I think she likes me——”

"She told me so," Hedford agreed. "But we must decide at once. I think the woman is honest. I am absolutely certain she was in deadly fear when she gave me this."

"It is a grave responsibility," Leibritch said, in a low voice.

The young wife looked imploringly to Hedford. But she dared not speak.

"It is a grave responsibility," Hedford said decisively, "and I will take it."

He applied the antidote as the woman Hofer directed. In an hour Lord Frederick breathed with greater freedom. Before morning he was out of danger.

Next day the "Kaiser Wilhelm III," still under easy steam, made better progress, owing to the falling away of the strong headwind. Toward the afternoon Captain Stein held a large reception in his room. Lady Erskine, Colonel Hedford, Dr. Leibritch, and Mr. Trowbrigg were present. When the door was shut and locked, it was soon evident that the reception was in reality a Court of Justice.

Since Surgeon-Colonel Hedford started on the extraordinary career partly forced upon him by

stress of circumstances which we have so far described, he had twice acted in an apparently brutal manner. But his action was unpremeditated in both cases. At least he had not had sufficient time to consider his own conduct. He had arrived at a rough-and-ready sort of justice, no doubt. But he had been altogether illegal. This time he would take his man alive. Trowbrigg was delighted. The work was becoming almost professional. Hedford was examining counsel. Lady Erskine was the principal witness. She gave her evidence clearly, in the main, although she nearly fainted more than once from nervous strain. Hedford helped her as far as possible.

"Tell the Captain," he began, "what you told me this morning. Take your own time. Do not hurry. Do not exhaust yourself. When you met your husband first you were——"

"I was a waitress in Andrassy's beer-garden in Chicago," Lady Erskine answered simply.

"Just go on in your own way," Hedford said, to encourage her.

"My father was once a wealthy man," the girl commenced in a trembling voice that steadied a little as she went on, "but owing to Wall Street

speculations he—he did something. I don't know what. He left New York and went West. I never heard from him since. I could get nothing to do. My father's sin was visited upon me. At last, in Chicago, to save myself from want, I took a place in Andrassy's beer-garden. One evening I was insulted by a drunken rowdy. Lord Frederick, who was seated at an adjoining table, defended me. We became friends, and in a month we were married. I was against it for his sake—perhaps you will not believe me——”

“No one will dispute your statement in this room,” the president of the court put in, with an emphasis which suggested that the disputant would promptly find himself outside. Hedford smiled. His views of life had broadened since he left India. Humanity can be diagnosed as accurately as its diseases. He had learned that. It is a good start in the making of a competent sociologist. He would have staked his life on the word of the witness.

“And then?” he said in a kindly voice.

“We thought of trying orange farming in Florida—my husband had a little money left; but before we started, Andrassy, as the German

employees called him, waited on us. He showed me a letter from a firm of solicitors in San Francisco, which stated that my father had been killed by falling down the shaft of a mine he had bought. The mine turned out well. I was my father's only legatee. I would be entitled to a large fortune when the tedious legal formalities were completed. Meantime Andrassy offered to advance any money we required and advised us to go to Europe. I thought this very kind of him, especially as—as he had once been rude to me, and——”

“You left for Europe,” Hedford supplied.

“Yes, we went at once, and after a short stay in Paris, were received with great kindness at Winchlesmere Castle. We were happy for a month. Then——”

“Take a little wine—I insist.” It was the order of the president of the court, so it must be obeyed.

“A letter came from Andrassy saying that the mine had turned out a failure, and by the same post the Earl received my history. He insulted me before Lord Frederick, and an hour afterwards we left the Castle.

“Andrassy met us in London and proposed that

my husband should insure his life for an enormous sum, and transfer the policy—as security for the money which he had advanced us—to his step-brother, a money-lender in Town. This was done. That is all I know.”

Lady Erskine was conducted to her state-room by Colonel Hedford.

On his return, the examining counsel had only one further question to put. It was to Dr. Leibritch.

“Was Andrassy a passenger on the ‘Heckla’ when the man who had the same form of throat disease as Lord Frederick Erskine died of it and was thrown overboard?”

“He was,” Leibritch answered.

On which Colonel Hedford addressed the court at some length, and in a forcible peroration demanded that the men Hofer and Andrassy should be forthwith put in irons. He would answer for their prosecution when the ship reached port. His colleague, Mr. Trowbrigg, possessed a convenient knack of picking locks. They had visited Andrassy’s state-room uninvited in his absence, and found what Hedford expected—the gipsy fungus!

Captain Stein decided quickly. His order, was promptly obeyed so far as Hofer was concerned. The Hungarian gipsy was soon in irons, but Andrassy could not be found.

“Steamer ahead!”

The hail from the look-out distracted the interest of the searchers. The “Kaiser Wilhelm” had now been so long at sea, any interruption in the monotony of the voyage was welcome. Passengers and crew all crowded up to see the coming ship. Then when all on the “Kaiser Wilhelm,” including the officer on the bridge—and just for a moment the man at the wheel—were watching the Blue Star Liner S.S. “Magnificent,” a cloaked figure dashed into the wheel-house. A blow on the head with an iron bar laid the man at the wheel below it. The steam steering-wheel spun round and the vessel, answering her helm instantly, swung broadside athwart the “Magnificent’s” bows. The first lieutenant rushed to the wheel-house. He was too late. The “Magnificent” struck the “Kaiser Wilhelm” amidships and crashed almost through her.

There was no time for anything. The watertight compartment doors were all open, as they

had been kept with the rigid exactitude of seafaring men. Hardly five minutes elapsed before the stricken ship began to settle down. Old Stein behaved like a hero, and his officers and crew followed his lead. He had been a bit of a martinet. Fire and boat-drill on any ship he commanded were no amateurish pretences. The petty officers and men knew their stations exactly and took them instinctively. There was a good deal of boatswain's whistling and shouting of orders, and telegraphing fore and aft, and a dumb, helpless, huddling together of the appalled passengers. The undisciplined many behaved sensibly, stood aside, did nothing, trusted all to, and did not impede the disciplined few on whom they wisely felt their lives or any chance of life depended. They raised a feeble cheer when the first of the boats went over the side.

But the ship was settling fast. One side was a mass of wreckage. She listed heavily to port. The colliding steamer stood off to examine her own injuries. Captain Stein grasped the situation. He knew his ship would sink under him before one half his passengers could be got into the boats. His despairing signals to the other steamer had

been ignored. Then it must be the good old story. The weakest must survive!

"Women and children first," Stein roared, standing at the starboard companion with a revolver in his right hand.

The sea was perfectly calm. Each boat was manned by a small crew, lowered from the davits, and rowed to the companion ladder to take off passengers—women and children first!

A man dashed forward.

"Stop," Stein thundered.

Surgeon-Colonel Hedford intervened, saying, as he put his hand on Andrassy's shoulder, "Don't trouble, Captain, this man is mine."

Andrassy wrenched himself free and made a dash for the companion. A puff of smoke spurted from Stein's revolver. The report was hardly heard. Andrassy, shot through the head, went over the companion rail. His body fell into the sea close to the boat which was being filled.

"I think that man is mine, Colonel Hedford," Stein said grimly.

Then in a loud voice the old Viking bade his passengers beware. He was captain of the "Kaiser

Wilhelm III." till she sunk. And she was still above water.

The "Magnificent," badly injured, and almost sinking, stood by the "Kaiser Wilhelm" after all.

The present Earl of Winchelsmere — Lord Frederick Erskine succeeded to the title last year—is rapidly making his mark in the Upper House.

The gipsy's antidote to the poison used by Andrassy is not in the Pharmacopœia.

Surgeon-Colonel Hedford means to put it there.

IV.—THE MISSING HAMLET.

"I AM tired of my life!"

"Don't be a fool. What signifies a single hostile criticism?"

"A single criticism! A hundred criticisms! I tell you that man Wilfred Haughton persecutes me. If I ignore his suggestions, I am incorrigible; if I follow his advice, I am only imitative—a fairly good mimic, but an actor never. I said I was tired of my life; so I am. If he carries the thing much further, I may become tired of his life."

"I think, if I were you, I would do any talking of that sort in a less public place than the dining-room of the Kit-Kat. That Russian over there at the table by the window must have heard every word you said. Of course, such nonsense is merely ridiculous, but it might get you into trouble. Don't scowl at me. Last night, in the

billiard-room, several men said Haughton ought to apply for police protection. They were, of course, laughing at your threats, of which they told me you had been extremely liberal. Disgusting!"

The two speakers were seated at a supper-table in the Kit-Kat Club, a little after midnight. The man who grumbled was young, good-looking, fashionably dressed, and in unaffected despair. The other, who remonstrated, was elderly, and of large circumference. He ate his supper with very good appetite, and appeared to be respectable in the sense wherein the word was used before it was sneered to death by the degenerates.

"It is not pleasant," the elder man resumed, "to hear a fellow like you—perfectly sensible in many respects—talk like a fool. It vexes me. Do me a favour. Don't worry yourself into hysterics. Go straight to your rooms when you leave the Club, and let the critic go to—elsewhere."

"I'll take your advice," the younger man said, rising from his chair. "I will go straight home."

He kept his promise; but, unhappily, he did the journey by instalments. They parted on the steps of the Club, and the elder man turned back to write a letter. It read thus:—

"DEAR HAUGHTON,—

"As a friend of yourself and young Coulson, might I ask you to modify the extreme rigour of your critiques on the contemporary representative of the Prince of Denmark. The truth is, a lady's name is freely mentioned in this matter, and gossip stoutly maintains that the new Ophelia is the cause of your sudden change of opinion regarding Coulson's ability. This is surely undesirable. Meet me here to-morrow at twelve. I want to talk to you for a minute or two.

Yours faithfully,

THOMAS GASTEEN."

Having written his letter, Mr. Gasteen handed it to a waiter, and went to bed with a good conscience, and a digestion which had never once failed in its arduous labours.

Henry Coulson, a young and rising actor, walked some distance irresolutely after he left the Club. His state of mind was not compatible with domestic regularity—even the plastic regularity of bachelor's quarters. He had been furiously rated in the *Fleet* for his conception of Hamlet. It is true he had been many times

praised by the same organ for his successful presentation of less exacting rôles. The praise he had accepted lightly, as a tribute to his manifest ability. But the dispraise wounded him, as it was necessarily owing to the spleen of the critic who condemned him. He made several calls on his way home, in the hope of mitigating his unhappiness.

Wilfred Haughton, dramatic critic and leader-writer, had meantime dropped into the Kit-Kat, and found Gasteen's letter. It annoyed him extremely, the reference to the lady being, he considered, pointedly impertinent. He had written simply what he conceived to be his duty to his paper. This miserable gossip was intolerable. Count Tzerkof, the Russian, was still sitting at the window. Haughton knew him very well, and took a seat at his table.

"Pity the sorrows of a poor critic, Count," Haughton said lugubriously.

"A poor critic, Mr. Haughton? Surely not a poor critic!"

"Then say a miserable critic, who is heartily sick of the complaints of people whose fortunes he has helped to make. When I praise, I am a Daniel come to judgment; when I hint at a fault, I am a prejudiced scoundrel."

"How easy, then, for you to stand well with these people when their gratitude and enmity alike depend upon yourself," the Russian said, with a smile.

"Their gratitude and enmity are very much alike in one respect—they are both more or less sham."

Count Tzerkof ordered a fresh bottle of a special vintage, and said: "Try this wine. A glass of it will make you my debtor, and half a bottle my friend."

When Haughton had given his opinion on the wine, the Russian leant forward, and said in a low voice: "Those articles of yours on the Nihilists were highly thought of at our Embassy, and have been sent to the Czar himself. They will do much to show the British people what a pestilent crew we in Russia have to rule."

This was flattering news to the leader-writer. Under its influence and that of the Count's excellent wine, he soon felt at peace with all men, including Henry Coulson. By the time the half-bottle he had been promised was finished, Haughton and Count Tzerkof had arranged for a fresh series of articles to appear in a London daily. These were to carry

further Haughton's previous exposure of the crimes of Nihilism. The material was to be supplied by the Count himself.

As Haughton was leaving, the Count handed him his cigar-case, saying: "Take one of these. They are my favourites."

"If they are as good as your wine I shall not complain." Haughton selected a cigar, lit it, bade the Count good night, saying: "I'll see you to-morrow."

"Perhaps," the Count answered.

"Better have a candle, sir," the night porter said to Coulson, who reached the building in which he had a flat very late that night, or early in the next morning. "Something went wrong with the electric light an hour ago, and we are in darkness."

Coulson took the candle and went upstairs. As he turned into the corridor which led to his rooms, a draught from an open window blew out the light. The familiar door was easily found, however, and the actor entered his room, which was in darkness save for a faint glimmer from the fire. Mechanically he tried the electric switch; but the fuse was blown, as in all the other rooms. He

groped his way cautiously to a sofa, and lay down. He was tired out, and although he only meant to rest a few moments, he fell fast asleep, and did not awake for two hours. He was very cold when he awoke, and so endeavoured to restore the fire, which had almost burnt out. He succeeded in coaxing up a little flickering flame ; and when he found the fire was likely to improve, he went to his favourite arm-chair, and sat down—but not on the chair. Something else was sitting on it. For a second Coulson's heart stopped beating. He put up his left hand and clutched at the thing he felt hanging over his right shoulder. It was a man's face.

Henry Coulson sprang to his feet. As he did so, the figure which he had disturbed in the chair sank slowly off it, and fell with a thud on the floor, where it lay in a heap, partly visible in the glimmer of the firelight. With desperate haste Coulson ran his hands through his pockets, searching for his matchbox. When he found it, his hands were trembling so much that he opened the lid with a jerk which spilled most of the contents on the floor. After that he struck several matches so violently that the heads were knocked off without igniting

the stems. At last he got one to burn, and then he went over to the heap on the hearthrug. The man was lying face downward. Coulson turned him over and looked at his face.

It was Wilfred Haughton.

He must have been dead some time, for the body was cold.

For some minutes Coulson could neither think nor speak, much less act. He stood staring at the body and striking match after match, quite forgetful of his candle, till the last was burnt out. Then he was alone in the darkness with his enemy. But his enemy was dead.

The full horror of his situation came speedily upon Coulson. From Haughton's lips a strong smell could be detected. The actor was well read, and had been a medical student for a couple of terms, by way of pastime. His slight knowledge was not enough to enable him to diagnose the case, but it was more than sufficient to point to poison as the cause of death. He now thought rapidly. Gasteen's warning flashed upon him. He had been heard threatening Haughton; the body would be found in his rooms; it had been there at least two hours; it could not possibly be got rid

of! He could form no plan for its disposal, and so acted by blind, unforeseeing instinct—that of immediate escape.

A train left Charing Cross at 5.30 a.m. for Sandmouth. By eight in the morning he could be on Charlie Despard's yacht, which was lying in the harbour. He knew it was there, because the previous morning he had received a telegram asking him to run down on the following Sunday. Despard would believe his story, help him, hide him; sail him round the world, if necessary, and land him in some heathenish country where no extradition warrant could reach him. To leave England by any ordinary route would only mean his arrest as soon as the vessel in which he sailed reached its destination.

Henry Coulson dragged the dead body into his bedroom, and laid it on the bed. He composed the limbs decently, and covered the face with a cloak. Then he threw a few necessary articles of clothing into a bag, and left a note on the table of his sitting-room saying that he was hastily called away for a couple of days, and that his rooms must on no account be disturbed in his absence. He stole down the main staircase, and let himself out into the street.

The sixty-ton cutter yacht "Vanduara" lay almost becalmed in the Channel. Her owner, Charlie Despard, fretted—whistled for wind, and swore with great deliberation and emphasis. Coulson had come on board the previous morning and told his story. When it was finished, Despard said shortly :

"You have made a terrible mess of it by bolting. You must get back at once."

"Get back! If you won't save me—that is, if you are afraid to save me—I'll drop overboard. Better that than——" he paused abruptly.

Despard thought the story over calmly and carefully, and came to the conclusion that he must stand by his friend in peril, however foolishly that friend had acted.

"Very well," he said suddenly ; "if you take the risk I cannot do less." He went to the head of the companion, and bawled out :

"For'ard there! Up anchor and get sail on boat at once!"

When they were some miles from Sandmouth, the wind fell, and the yacht drifted with the tide all night. At noon on the second morning out there was still not the faintest breath of a breeze ;

not a ripple on the sea. The great sails flapped lazily as the yacht rose and fell over a smooth-surfaced swell, which at long intervals moved inward from the open. Coulson tramped the deck feverishly. His anguish was terrible.

A good supply of stores was on board. The yacht was really provisioned for a long cruise. This was good, and at last the wind came, which was better, although it was a head wind. But there also came a tug-boat steaming unmistakably for the "Vanduaara," and this was very bad—the worst possible.

The tug was happily four miles astern, and as the yacht's great wings were quickly set to catch the breeze, she was travelling fast, racing into the wind, before the four miles had been reduced to three.

"What is that astern?" Despard asked his skipper carelessly, pointing to the tremendous smoke cloud which the tug was sending up.

"Old Sandmouth Harbour tug, sir, 'Sampson,'" the skipper answered, looking through his glasses. "Regular tub. They can't get more than seven knots out of her."

"What are we making now? Six?"

"Hardly that, sir. Better'n five. Y'see we're close hauled, and that ain't our best point of sailing, as you know, sir."

"If we let her go off anything we'll not weather the Head on this tack?"

"I would go about, sir, and stand off a bit. The 'Sampson' will go straight for the point, and wait for us there. That is, if you think they are after us—no offence, sir."

"Not at all," Despard said quietly. "I do think they are after us. And they shall continue after us."

"I'm your man, sir!" said the skipper, swallowing his quid in his enthusiasm.

The "Vandura" stood well out to sea before she went about. Then her head was laid to windward of the point where the tug was waiting as the skipper had foreseen. The breeze was freshening fast. Once past the point they could ease off the sheets and let her travel. It would then require something liker a torpedo-destroyer than the "Sampson" to overhaul them.

"Hand up the balloon-jib there, for'ard! Lively now! We'll get it on her once we are clear."

The balloon-jib was got on deck, but kept out

of sight of those on board the tug, and the yacht with increasing speed swept toward the headland, for the wind was still rising. As the "Vanduara" neared the rocky point over which the waves were boiling, the tug ran from under the lee of the head, and stood across her bows.

Despard made a motion with his hand. The "Vanduara" stood up closer into the wind. On that, the tug went ahead a turn or two, with the object of forcing the yacht right into the wind's eye. This was what Despard wanted. The crafts neared each other rapidly.

"Heave to in the Queen's name!" The hail came from the tug.

"Aye! aye! What do you want?" This to gain time. The yacht was still forging ahead. The dangerous point was now weathered.

"We want Henry Coulson on a charge of murder."

"Keep her away." Despard ordered.

"Ay! ay! sir. Away it is."

"Ease off the sheets there for'ard. Ease off the main sheet. Handsomely now."

As the yacht's head paid off quickly, the master of the tug saw that he had been out-manœuvred.

He went full speed astern, but before he could get way on his boat the "Vandura" shot between the "Sampson" and the breakers, and dashed for the open sea under every stitch of canvas the spars would stand.

"Lie down every man!" Despard shouted, taking the helm himself. A couple of rifle bullets sung harmlessly through the rigging. The owner kept the helm until the yacht was out of range. Then the "Sampson" steamed back to port, seeing that pursuit was hopeless.

While this race was being prepared for and run in the English Channel, London was deeply stirred. The commotion began in the Imperial Theatre on the first evening of Henry Coulson's flight. The house was packed from floor to ceiling, a fact partly owing to the excellence of the performance, but largely contributed by the persistent dispraise of the leading actor in a section of the Press. Certain paragraphs in the society papers bracketing the names of the leading actor, the leading actress, and a well-known dramatic critic, were also useful in swelling the receipts, and, in consequence, the hilarity of the managerial heart. Several members of the

Russian Embassy, including Count Tzerkof, were present. Mr. Thomas Gasteen and Miss Mary Hamilton were in the stage box. Mary's sister Ethel was playing Ophelia. She had gone on the stage a year after her father's death, and was fast making a name.

There was a long wait. The overture was partially played a second time. Signs of impatience were emphatically shown by the gods. The pit chimed in timorously. At last, amid some uproar, the manager appeared before the curtain, and when order was temporarily restored, he tried to make the best of a bad situation. *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark could hardly be presented as a stage play. Mr. Henry Coulson was indisposed, and his understudy had that morning met with an accident in the street. Money would be returned at the doors, and the house would be open as usual next evening.

The gods and pitmen hissed energetically, broke up some of the furniture to mark their sense of the unfitness of the occasion, and withdrew riotously, but without forgetting to obtain their money at the doors.

Outside, newsboys were crying extra special editions of the evening paper.

"Horrible murder of a dramatic critic. Flight of the alleged murderer." These lines were on all the bills in large type.

Gasteen hurried Mary Hamilton round to the stage door, obtained admission readily, and found her sister Ethel, still dressed as Ophelia, holding the evening paper before her in dismay.

"Oh, Mr. Gasteen and Mary, I am so thankful you have come! Something must be done at once. There can be no doubt as to who the 'alleged murderer' is. But he's no murderer. He's an honourable gentleman, I know that. You will help me, Mr. Gasteen. Telegraph to Colonel Hedford of Salchester. He is very clever and very kind. It is only an hour's journey by rail. He will come if you telegraph in my name."

"I have no doubt," Mr. Gasteen said, so emphatically that Ophelia was rather embarrassed. She directed the old gentleman to the nearest telegraph office and hurried him out.

Mr. Gasteen, notwithstanding his great circumference, got through a good deal of physical exercise that evening; the first result of which

was that Surgeon-Colonel Hedford met the doctor sent from Scotland Yard at Henry Coulson's rooms the same night. The police surgeon was pleased to act with so distinguished a specialist, and soon put Hedford in possession of the rather meagre facts which the case so far presented. Nothing had been disturbed from the time that Coulson's bedroom had been broken into by the proprietor of the chambers on receipt of a telegram from the theatre.

Hedford knelt over the body and said immediately, "Prussic acid."

Campbell, the police doctor, nodded, on which Hedford, who was making rapid progress in the detective part of his duties, began a careful examination of the bedroom. In this the police had anticipated him.

"Needn't trouble," Campbell said. "That has been done already."

"Then I'll try the other room."

"Our men have not left much," Campbell added when Hedford crawled from under the table, where he had been sprawling on all fours.

"Not very much," Hedford said aloud, "but something is better than nothing," he said to him-

self, as he picked up that something from under one of the claw feet of the table and put it in his pocket. "What has been done so far?"

"Warrant for Coulson's arrest. He has been traced. Probably taken by this time. Post-mortem at ten to-night. Care to assist?"

"No, thanks. The post-mortem can only prove that death has been caused by prussic acid. Oh! Here's Trowbrigg!"

The two left the house together, and three days later Henry Coulson surrendered himself. He changed his mind when the sea breezes had braced his mental and physical condition—both suffering from overwork—into better health. His unfortunate flight had produced its natural result. His case was prejudged. The public unanimously believed him guilty, but pitied both himself and his victim. For Ethel Hamilton there was no mercy in contemporary comment. Two men had quarrelled about her and one had killed the other. It was all the fault of the woman—who, indeed, had shown no special regard for either. This convenient theory simplifies many complex issues, and is serviceable in helping the weakest to the wall.

At the police-court examination which followed the inquest, Dr. Campbell proved that Wilfred Haughton had been poisoned by prussic acid. He detailed the usual symptoms in the usual way—skin dusky red in hue, deepening to dark purple; *dura mater* and sinuses much congested, also lungs and brain; had used the sulphur test, &c. The waiter in the Kit-Kat, who had served Haughton on the night of his death, proved that he left the Club apparently in his usual health. Count Tzerkof, who had been summoned, corroborated. The night porter at Abercorn Mansions, who let the dramatic critic in, deposed that he seemed in good health and in excellent spirits. He told the porter that he would wait until Mr. Coulson came in, and went upstairs. He was smoking a cigar. The rest of the evidence was immaterial.

Henry Coulson was returned for trial, and Surgeon-Colonel Hedford took up his case in earnest, partly under the impression that the prisoner was not really guilty, and partly owing to Ethel Hamilton's supplications. The girl had acted with Coulson for some months, and found him to be really what she had already said—an honourable gentleman. She implored the Specialist

to put forth his best efforts, and closed an impassioned appeal very abruptly by saying breathlessly :

“ But, you know, it isn’t because I care for him in that way, but because I believe him to be innocent.”

Hedford was relieved to hear that she did not care for the prisoner in “ that way,” but did not inquire into the meaning of the phrase.

Two weeks passed without result. The Specialist had interrogated the waiter at the Kit-Kat closely, but merely discovered that Coulson and Haughton had been on bad terms, which he knew already. The Russian Count and the critic had always been very friendly.

“ The Count stood ’im, the very night of ’is death, a bottle of rare old wine, sir. It cost him a guinea. Nothin’ could be more friendly.”

“ Did the Count stand cigars? ”

“ No, sir ; at least, he did not buy any. But ’is case is always full ; he gives ’em away by the dozen. A perfect gentleman is what ’e is, sir. He gave me ’alf a sovereign—much obliged to you, sir. Didn’t expect it. Sorry I could not tell you more.”

On the Monday evening of the third week, Trowbrigg hurriedly entered Colonel Hedford's room in the small hotel at which he put up.

"The Count's going to-night. Has obtained leave on plea of urgent family affairs. Boat-train, 8 p.m."

"Very well," Hedford said ; "we go by the boat-train, 8 p.m. There is no time to lose."

They arrived at the railway station just as the boat-train was on the moment of starting. Trowbrigg jumped into an empty second-class compartment, but Hedford leisurely walked down the platform, accompanied by two porters with his luggage. They had been paid in advance, and were promised more under one condition.

"Here you are, sir," said one of the porters, hastily unlocking the door of the only first-class compartment which was marked "engaged." Its occupant protested loudly, in a slightly foreign accent ; but Hedford was in, the door re-locked, and the train in motion before the attention of the guard could be called.

Surgeon-Colonel Hedford tendered a courteous apology for an intrusion which he admitted was unwarrantable, but which he hoped the necessary

haste attending his movements—the train being almost in motion at the time—would excuse. Count Tzerkof received the apology coldly but later thawed somewhat, and eventually the two men were conversing with an appearance of mutual interest. The Russian spoke English with idiomatic correctness. He had travelled much and observed much. His conversation was both educated and refined. Hedford's experience of the world had also been large and his knowledge of life was profound. The talk between the two became at times so interesting that Hedford forgot that he had serious business on hand. The express dashed on.

“As to Nihilism, Count Tzerkof said, in answer to an interpolated remark of Hedford's, “what can you British know about it? In my country there is no real liberty. There is therefore always rebellion, overt or covert. Desperate oppression produces desperate resistance. We are bullied, fined, flogged, exiled, in a way you British would not stand for a month. Make allowance for a people who for their sins—their ignorance I mean—have had to stand it for centuries. Don't expect the virtues of the civilised from the man who from

his environment is perforce a savage. We do not what we wish; only what we can. We are not miserable from choice—Bah! If I talk like this you will say I am a Nihilist.” The Russian leant back lazily and laughed.

“I am aware that you are a Nihilist, Count Tzerkof,” Hedford said, in the indifferent tone of a man who has politely agreed to a weather forecast by a stranger.

Count Tzerkof was silent for about a minute. His eyes sparkled rather fiercely under the fur travelling cap he wore. But when he spoke his voice was steady and without a trace of either surprise or temper.

“Your imagination, sir, runs too fast. It is not necessary to belong to the people in order to feel for them.”

“But your recent expression of opinion,” Hedford said, with studied politeness, “means——”

“Means that Count Paul Tzerkof is generous of sympathy when it costs him nothing.”

“The Count Paul is also very careless about his papers. I mean his Nihilistic papers, such as this.” Hedford’s bolt was shot. He smoothed a badly printed leaflet on his knee with a hand which

would have trembled if his will had permitted it.

"I keep my papers as I please," the Count said coldly, after one glance at the paper. "Meantime, we need not argue the matter further. Will you smoke? Try one of these. They are my favourites."

"Thank you. Have you a match?"

Hedford struck the match awkwardly. It burnt his fingers and he dropped it on the floor of the carriage. He stooped and picked it up before the flame had gone out. He was able to light his cigar with what remained of it.

Soon after Hedford took the cigar from his lips and said excitedly, "There is something wrong with this cigar—the flavour——"

"There is something wrong with you," the Russian interrupted. "In a few seconds I shall place your dead body under the seat. It will be found by the railway servants. There will be an inquest, but I shall not give evidence. I shall be well on my way to Russia when they hold it." He spoke these words as it were to himself, as if he had no listener, and he kept his face turned away from Hedford. When he looked round again,

which he did with an effort, and saw his companion looking at him calmly, his jaw dropped.

"You smoked my cigar?" he cried.

"No, no," Hedford answered. "I smoked my own. This is your cigar, and this is my revolver." He produced both the cigar and pistol simultaneously, one in either hand. And in this way the men sat until the train drew up on the pier. Trowbrigg was at the carriage door. He had two policemen with him. Colonel Hedford charged Count Tzerkof with the murder of Wilfred Haughton, and the constables took the Russian into custody.

At the Count's trial it was proved by papers which Trowbrigg, in his clever if somewhat unscrupulous way, had annexed at the Russian's residence, that he belonged to an advanced section of the Nihilists, and that he had been chosen as the executioner of Wilfred Haughton. The leader-writer's articles must be stopped. The most effective way to do this was to kill the writer. Count Tzerkof's high social and official position rendered him the safest instrument. Besides, the Count had already carried out several executions without fear, and with no shadow of reproach.

But this was not known at the time, and never would have been known without Surgeon-Colonel Hedford's evidence.

Hedford proved that the half-smoked cigar which he found in Henry Coulson's room contained a silver tube with two empty chambers, in one of which he had detected traces of prussic acid, and in the other of a fulminating chemical which, when the cigar had burned close enough, would by expansion impel the poison into the mouth of the smoker. The cigar was rolled in such a way that it drew perfectly, notwithstanding the tube; and the chamber for the chemical was protected, so that it was only when an inward breath was taken that the heat was great enough to impel the poison. The infernal machine would not therefore discharge itself while the cigar was momentarily withdrawn from the smoker's mouth. Further, the cigar which Count Paul Tzerkof had given Colonel Hedford in the railway carriage, and, indeed, all those in the case which had been found upon him by the police, were similarly fitted. They all contained the prussic acid tube. This poison is deadly if admitted to the mouth even though it be not swallowed. Its vapour alone is fatal. The case was complete.

Count Paul Tzerkof was executed.

Henry Coulson was lionised.

The Imperial doubled its receipts during the remainder of the season.

V.—DECLINED WITH THANKS.

MR. WALLACE ARMSTRONG, M.P., had been three times Mayor of Salchester, and he had more than once declined the honour of knighthood during his terms of office. When his party was swept out of power by the flowing or ebbing tide of the political moment it was reported in the Press that the Mayor of Salchester had refused a baronetcy. Some wondered at the Mayor's humility; others, professing greater knowledge, sneered at his insatiable ambition. The Mayor himself meanwhile went steadily on, rendering great services to his party, spending money recklessly to further its interests—and waiting. Everything comes to those who know how to wait, and Armstrong did more than merely wait: he worked—and sweated his factory girls so far as the Acts permitted.

Gerald Armstrong, the Mayor's only son, was

an excellent foil to many of his father's best intentions. He had been sent down from Cambridge for something discreditable, and after spending a year or two abroad, he returned to the paternal roof to form, as it were, a dark background against which his father's wisdom and piety showed with great brightness. This contrast, although sometimes convenient, was really distressing to the Mayor, who feared and, indeed, believed, that in addition to all the bets and debts he had paid, and scandals he had hushed up, Gerald would one day cover him with unsupportable disgrace. The sins of the son were thus somewhat heavily visited upon the father, and the father's devotion, as is usual in such cases, was proportionately great.

When the great election of 189— came on, it will be remembered that the country rose to the occasion. Mr. Armstrong rose with it. His interest was of great service in most of the manufacturing towns around Salchester, and his money was useful generally. Many seats were captured. When an ex-Cabinet Minister was sent to contest one of the divisions of Salchester, the Mayor felt the opportunity of his life had come. He would

make the East Division of Salchester his "coping-stone." He would win it for the ex-Cabinet Minister, and then the inhabitants of his native city would find out the full glory of the man they had thrice made their chief magistrate.

The political excitement was so keen that Surgeon-Colonel Hedford was drawn into the struggle. He cared nothing for politics, but his friends dragged him to meetings, and pushed him upon platforms where, to his own surprise, he made speeches and wondered what the people were cheering about—which, as a rule, they did not know themselves. Hedford served on one of the ex-Cabinet Minister's Committees, and so was brought into daily contact with the Mayor, whose indomitable perseverance and energy he could not but admire. He also made Gerald Armstrong's acquaintance, and was not long in arriving at the opinion that rumour for once had understated the case against the culprit.

This was enough to arouse Hedford's interest. Gerald was in every way such an efficient scoundrel as to repay a student of character for the most minute examination. These two, therefore, began to pass as friends with the Mayor's party. They

really had one point in common: neither cared for politics.

"Confounded rot, this political tomfoolery," Gerald said frankly one day, when he met Hedford on his way to a Committee meeting. "I wonder why you bore yourself with it."

"It is rather a bore, I must admit," Hedford answered. "But one must do one's duty to the country."

"Duty be hanged! The country can take care of itself without my bothering. That's my idea!"

"Perhaps you are right," Hedford said coldly. "Your interference might not do any good. At the same time, I think you ought to show yourself at the meeting in St. George's Hall to-night. I suggest it merely as a matter of expediency. Your continued absence gives annoyance to your father."

"Oh, dad's all right. I can twist him round my little finger. Why, last week, I got fifty out of the old chap after he had sworn he would not bleed another sixpence for the next three months. And I managed it by the simplest dodge in the world. I pretended——"

"I am busy now. You can tell me at another time."

"Dear me!" young Armstrong sneered. "That is as much as to say that you have got on your moral stilts. You are very seldom off them."

"I would rather be on moral stilts than be a moral idiot," Colonel Hedford replied sharply, turning away.

Armstrong followed him down the street, laughing heartily.

"On my soul I give you credit for that—Hedford." He was going to say "old chap," but the other's face stopped him. "I do indeed." He laughed again, and quite unaffectedly. It was not because he had lost all self-respect, but because he had never had any. "You see it so exactly describes me—a moral idiot—but it's rather rough from you."

"Why from me?"

"I mean from—a murderer." There was no malice in the way this was said. It was simply given as the necessary explanation.

"What do you mean?" Hedford asked, stopping suddenly and confronting Armstrong.

"You need not look so desperately shocked. I meant no harm. It was that collision when you were on the 'Kaiser Wilhelm.' I read about

it in Melbourne. Didn't you shoot a poor devil who was trying to get into a boat? I suppose you got all in a jolly funk. I should, if I had been there."

"You would," Hedford assented.

"But you all got off in the end?"

"No, not all. One man was shot, but not by me. Had you been there—the subject is disagreeable to me."

"Then we'll drop it by all means. And just to show there's no ill-feeling on my part, I'll turn up at the meeting to-night. I'll be on the platform."

"I am glad of that——" Hedford paused abruptly. He was about to offer some good advice, contrary to his rule, which was never to advise an adult, believing that if a man will not act wisely for his own sake, he certainly will not for the sake of his good adviser. They parted at a street corner without further conversation.

The meeting was disorderly and at times riotous. It had been meant for the friends of the ex-Cabinet Minister only, but both sides were strongly represented. One ugly rush was made for the platform. It was narrowly defeated. Just at this moment Gerald Armstrong arrived. His

presence on the platform was hailed by the opposition with loud groans, and by the other side with tremendous cheers. The young fellow had always been liberal with his father's money, and so had a considerable following in the hall.

But Hedford had made a bad mistake in bringing Gerald to the meeting. When Mr. Wallace Armstrong, M.P., thrice Lord Mayor of Salchester, sat down after delivering a well-constructed speech on the "Liberty of the Individual"—which must certainly suffer if his nominee were not elected—a marked impression was observable in the audience. The people had previously been frenzied by a passionate address from the ex-Cabinet Minister, wherein a little outburst of high treason had been violently applauded, hats, handkerchiefs, umbrellas, bannerets, and everything movable being waved aloft in great enthusiasm. When Mr. Armstrong, however, sat down after his coldly practical statement, there was almost silence. The audience was really moved by the plain sense of the speaker. Their silence betrayed more respect, if less enthusiasm. It was soon disturbed.

A haggard workman in the centre of the hall stood up and began to speak. His voice was

instantly drowned by discordant cries from Armstrong's party. He demanded a hearing. They threatened to throw him out.

"Tyranny!" the man yelled.

The single word produced an extraordinary effect on the people. Armstrong, who knew the temper of an audience, and could gauge its impulses with exactitude, saw a crisis was imminent. He stepped forward, asked the workman to ascend the platform, and begged the people to hear him. "A fair field and no favour," he claimed, had been his guiding principle through life. This took with the audience. Great cheering followed in which both sides joined. When he got upon the platform the workman was trembling with excitement, but he was too much in earnest to allow any nervous strain to prevent him from giving his "message" to the meeting.

"Men of Salchester," the impromptu speaker began in a thin voice which was heard with difficulty, "you have listened to Mr. Armstrong's speech on the liberty of the individual——"

"Speak up!"

"I will speak up in a minute," the man said, his voice gathering a little strength. "It's a fine

theory, is Mr. Armstrong's, and I just want to tell you summat about Mr. Armstrong's practice. My girl, Molly Jones, as fine a lass as ever stepped, went into his factory when she was sixteen year old—that's three years ago—and 'andsomely he's treated her."

"Shut up! No personalities!"

"No personalities! Isn't it all personalities so far? And isn't it a 'fair field and no favour' that Mr. Armstrong has claimed for me? I'll say my say, and you can judge between him and me——"

It was a psychological moment. Any interference with the man would surely turn the people in his favour. Armstrong arose again, and raising his hand for silence once more asked for a patient hearing for his critic. The Mayor was again vehemently cheered. The speaker was non-plussed. He could not understand such generosity from a man he had all his life regarded as a merciless slave-owner, a "bloated" capitalist, and a sworn enemy to the working class. He commenced again lamely, gave the hours his daughter had worked and the wages she had received, spoke of the hopeless misery and the profitless drudgery of the life, and then a sudden passion lent

him eloquence. He charged young Armstrong publicly with his daughter's ruin.

"And she's disgraced to-night, and he sits there among the highest in the land. And if that's the way individual liberty is to be divided between us lower orders and our betters, all I have to say is as hell will be a pleasant change for us."

The meeting broke up in confusion. On the platform it was felt that such language could be no longer permitted. Even Mr. Armstrong consented to the man's expulsion, and he was flung outside the hall in a damaged condition physically, but satisfied that he had said his say. The incident was unfortunate. It lessened Mr. Armstrong's influence with the electors, and although the ex-Cabinet Minister won his seat, it was by a narrow majority. Still, he won it, and the ambition of Wallace Armstrong's life was surely now secure. But it was not yet. Wallace Armstrong must wait.

Hedford was dining with the Mayor when the letter arrived which conveyed this unpleasant news. It was from the Cabinet Minister, and indicated as delicately as possible the reason why the Prime Minister's suggestion had been ignored.

"It is hard, very hard," the Mayor said, querulously, "that this ungrateful son of mine should thwart me at every point. You can see plainly from Lord Balcombe's letter why——" He broke off with an inarticulate growl and there came over his face an expression which Hedford had only seen once before—on the platform in St. George's Hall, when he was publicly shamed by the simple fact that he was the father of his son.

"Hard, very hard! And I have done so much for him."

"A good deal too much," Hedford said drily.

"You do not understand. You have been in India all the best years of your life. Your liver——"

"Is not quite what I would like. It does not, however, influence my judgment."

"Bah! You have no son."

Hedford felt thankful that he had not a son like the Mayor's, but he said nothing.

"What am I to do?" Armstrong asked appealingly. "What can I do with Gerald?"

"Very little. I mean, nothing at all unless you adopt strong measures. The time for kindness is past. If you want to make a man of your son—I

don't say a good man, only a colourable imitation—you will have to take my advice. But it is not my business to advise," he corrected hastily.

"Oh, yes, it is your business. Everything seems to be your business. Why not this amongst the rest? And I will do whatever you direct. How do you account for his being—being such a——"

"Consummate scoundrel," was in Hedford's mind. He kept it there, and said instead, "Put him into a private asylum for a year, and see whether it will do anything for him. He is really insane. He ought to be under restraint. Do you know that he is suffering from alcoholic poisoning at the present moment?"

"Dr. Aicken says he will be all right, so far as his health is concerned, in a short time," the Mayor answered.

"Then perhaps you had better follow Dr. Aicken's advice," Hedford said stiffly, and the subject was dropped.

Dr. Aicken was wrong. Gerald Armstrong did not get well in a few days, he got much worse. Nemesis is better late than never. The patient was troublesome and exacting, and consequently a great fuss was made about him. When young

Armstrong was at his worst, the girl Mary Jones was noticed hanging about the house, and was threatened by the police. She appealed to Hedford, who had put her in the way of earning an honest living.

"Only to see him once before he dies," she pleaded. This, of course, her social saviour could not accomplish. So she had to try a desperate and too successful an experiment. Two days later she was arrested on the charge of having attempted to murder Gerald Armstrong by poison.

It is unnecessary to dwell on the details elaborated at the police-court investigation after the arrest. In brief, Surgeon-Colonel Hedford swore that he was summoned urgently, at Dr. Aicken's request, to Martello Towers. He found Gerald Armstrong suffering from narcotic poisoning. He diagnosed the case as narcotic poisoning from the usual symptoms—flushing of the face at first; then extreme lividness, accompanied by contraction of the pupils, and low circulation. Chloral was the poison used. Dr. Aicken corroborated. Had the remedial treatment been delayed twenty minutes young Armstrong must have died.

Mrs. Douglas, housekeeper at the Towers, deposed that the nurse in charge of the case left at five o'clock on the evening of the attempted murder. An experienced nurse from London was to take her place within an hour. In the meantime she took charge of the patient. She was called out of the room to meet the prisoner, who was dressed in a nurse's costume and said that she had been sent from London to relieve the woman who had left. Mrs. Douglas had not been more than ten minutes out of the sick-room before giving over charge of the patient to the prisoner. Shortly after, Dr. Aicken arrived and found that young Armstrong had been poisoned. The prisoner became hysterical and her imposture, *i.e.*, that of being an experienced nurse, was at once detected. The police were sent for and she was taken into custody.

The police evidence was only important in proving that nothing criminating was found in the clothing of the accused.

By the grace of the Court the prisoner made a pathetic statement from the dock. She said she had frequently tried to see the man who had pretended he was her lover, but had always been

repulsed. One day she had been told by a servant, who had showed her some kindness, that a new nurse was coming from London. She personated that nurse, and when she got into the sick-room found to her horror that the patient was unconscious. She was about to ring for assistance when Dr. Aicken arrived. She would have given her life for Mr. Gerald—here she broke down.

After several remands the case was returned for trial. At the next assizes Mary Jones was acquitted for want of direct evidence to connect her with the actual administration of the poison. She had better luck than she deserved, most people said.

Surgeon-Colonel Hedford had an opinion of his own, but he kept it to himself. To ventilate it would only court disaster. He had no proofs. Meantime young Armstrong did the worst thing in the world for everybody connected with him as well as himself. He got better. His long-suffering father was the only person who admitted any satisfaction at this turn of affairs. Gerald Armstrong eventually got quite well, and so forgot all his good resolutions. Six months afterwards he died in a London hospital.

Then this paragraph appeared simultaneously in all the Salchester papers: "A vacancy will be immediately caused in the parliamentary representation of Salchester by the elevation of Mr. Wallace Armstrong (Mayor of the city and M.P. for the Southern Division) to the peerage. We understand that the new peer's title will be Lord Lithington."

Hedford read this at breakfast. Having done so, he sent for Mary Jones. His messenger knew where to find her, and she came at once. When she entered his study, he offered her a chair. She rested her arm on the chair back, but did not sit down.

"Please sit down," Hedford said kindly; "unless you wish me to stand."

"Oh, no, sir; please don't." The girl flopped into the chair.

"That's right. Now, will you just go over again that extraordinary story of yours—that night you got into Gerald Armstrong's room."

"I thought I told you, sir."

"Yes, so you did. I want to get the details accurately fixed in my mind. You are quite sure you heard someone leaving the room as you entered?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"And then you found an empty bottle labelled 'Chloral' on the floor?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you say you——"

"Say what, sir?"

"What did you do with the bottle?"

"I dropped it into a delf jug" (she meant an antique vase) "on the mantelpiece. Dr. Aicken was coming. I did not tell this to the solicitor. I never told it to anyone but you. You have been so kind to me—God's blessing 'on you, sir—and I did not tell you either until the trial was over."

"What was your object in that?"

"I didn't want to make trouble."

"If Mr. Armstrong had died from the poison it might have cost you your life."

The girl shrugged her shoulders, and said grimly:

"I'm none too fond of it."

"My dear Hedford, I am delighted to see you," the Mayor of Salchester said, as the Specialist was ushered into his reception-room. "I suppose you have heard the news and have come to congratulate me?"

"I have come to get you to do something for the girl Jones. If you refer to the peerage, I think you will decline that."

"Decline it! The ambition of my life!"

"Then it won't be gratified."

"What do you mean?"

"Look here." Hedford produced an empty bottle labelled "Poison." "You have seen this before, I believe?"

Armstrong flinched. He regained his nerve in a moment, and denied having seen the bottle. Afterwards he maintained his self-possession absolutely throughout a long and trying interview. Hedford had no case—mere suspicion is not enough to go to law on. He left the Towers at the suggestion of the proprietor and was ordered never to darken its doors again.

But Wallace Armstrong declined the peerage, and retired altogether from public life. He died soon after, heart-broken by the loss of his son it was said.

The citizens of Salchester raised a handsome monument in memory of the man who had been three times their Mayor. It contains a record of all the virtues which were his—and many others which were not.

VI.—THE HERMIT OF LETTERFRACK.

"I AM getting on," Surgeon-Colonel Hedford said to himself, as the hansom in which he was seated bowled rapidly along a London thoroughfare. "I am certainly becoming famous in my own particular line. When I undertook that 'Royal Standard' case I little thought it would eventually land me in——"

"Downing Street, sir," the cabman said through the trap-door, and pulled up suddenly. Hedford alighted, and in a few minutes he was in the presence of the Prime Minister, to whom he was duly presented by the Home Secretary.

"The business on which we have taken the unusual course of summoning you to a private conference here," the Premier said, in a serious voice, "is, as you will have surmised, of extreme

importance. Your record both in the Indian Medical Service and since as a toxicological expert is, of course, well known to us, and in consequence we have decided to trust implicitly to your judgment."

The Specialist bowed his acknowledgments.

"This document," the Prime Minister continued, "contains a tabulated list of deaths in various countries of persons who apparently died from natural causes, but whose lives we believe to have been sacrificed for political reasons. From General B——, Governor of the Prison in Sevastapol, or Von S——, Chief of the Berlin Police, to poor Ralston, an Irish resident magistrate, every man in this list has certainly forfeited his life in the discharge of his duty. This cannot be the work of a society, or the secret could not have been so rigidly preserved; nor can it be the work of an ordinary anarchist or assassin. The crimes are, we are satisfied, committed by a scientific murderer, and we depend on you to hang him." The Prime Minister spoke warmly.

"I see there is no column in this table dealing with the cause of death or supposed cause," said Hedford seriously.

"No, the cause of death is precisely what we wish you to deal with."

"And you will find," put in the Home Secretary, "in the succeeding pages of the document you hold in your hand a detailed report of the symptoms in every case. All the cases bear some slight resemblance to each other, as much as would suggest a common origin of disease; but the evidence deducible is very inexact, and so far we have only suspicions, which we look to you to turn into facts."

A long conversation followed, in which Hedford was taken into the unreserved confidence of the Ministers, and learned their reason for suspecting that the murderer, whose victims were scattered over the whole of Europe, was a citizen of Great Britain.

Surgeon-Colonel Hedford left Downing Street armed with extraordinary and almost unprecedented powers. But the importance and difficulty of his mission justified the freedom of action with which he had been entrusted.

The House on the Moor was a lonely place for an English sportsman out of health to spend his

holiday. As described in the advertisement which had attracted Frank Marshall's attention, it was a handsome country house, replete with all the resources of civilisation, and surrounded by great natural beauties—an oasis the more delightful from the vastness of the Connemara desert in which it was situated.

When Marshall arrived at the place he found a large building, very much out of repair, standing alone on a strip of desolate moorland on the Atlantic seaboard. The moor was not so large as stated in the advertisement, nor the game on it so plentiful, and the house was absolutely devoid of the resources which had been promised. There was but one item "up to sample"—the mountains! Had it not been for these, the shooting tenant would soon have repudiated his bargain. But the mountains held him. The great gloomy peaks, whose cloud-crowned summits rarely showed clear from the Atlantic mists, delighted the young Englishman, whose life had been passed in flat pasture-lands, where the horizon is usually limited to the nearest hedge. So Marshall remained for a time contentedly at the House on the Moor.

Viancani, the master of the house, was a moody

man, whose moroseness was ascribed to his solitary life by the public of Letterfrack, the only village in the neighbourhood. This solitude was interrupted once a year, when, in the shooting season, the hermit of the Moor House was able, by means of a glowing advertisement, to induce some sportsman to share his loneliness. Few of the visitors stayed out their time. Many went away in their first week—some white-faced, silent, refusing all manner of comment on their action. And none ever came back. When Marshall sauntered down the single street of Letterfrack a couple of days after his arrival, the gossips scanned him curiously, and old women nodded wisely to each other and whispered :

“It’s him that’s stayin’ at the House on the Moor.” The shopkeepers served him sullenly ; the gauger held aloof ; and with Marshall assuredly the police were reticent. This practical boycott, which Marshall early perceived, applied not only to the master of the house but to the stranger within its gates, roused the racial obstinacy of the Englishman. Viancani was a depressing companion ; and there was, in sober truth, something about his house, apart from its traditions, which

Marshall did not like and could not describe. There were nights when he had nightmares more horrible than the most fantastic imaginings of the insane—when he heard, or thought he heard, weird sounds, very terrible but very low, as if of muffled agony. And yet, when he sprang from his bed affrighted, he could hear nothing. The house would then be in silence—a silence so deep that, like the darkness of Egypt, it could be felt. It was altogether decidedly unpleasant; but Frank Marshall would let the imaginative villagers see the difficulty of turning an Englishman from the tenor of his own way.

One morning, at breakfast, Viancani noticed his "paying guest" sniffing critically at the unkempt appearance of the old woman who acted as house-keeper and general servant.

"You don't seem to admire Bridget," the master of the house said when the woman had left the room.

"'Admire' is scarcely the word," Marshall replied. "I wonder why you keep such a dreadful hag about the place."

"She suits me," Viancani said with an insolent ring in his voice.

"Then she does not suit me. And I should count for something. Or my money should count for something."

"Your money counts for nothing with me," Viancani answered lazily, pulling the ears of Bridget's cat—an enormous and evil-looking beast, at sight of which, when alone at night, many an honest man of Letterfrack had piously crossed himself.

"If my money does not count, why do you take it?" Marshall's temper was rising, but he spoke as calmly as the other.

"You wouldn't remain if I did not?"

"Certainly not; but why do you advertise your house when you do not want the rent?"

"My young friend," Viancani said slowly, "if I answered that my affairs are not your business I do not think you would have any right to complain. But I do not wish, so far as you are concerned, to remain within my rights. I will tell you, therefore, one reason why I let my rooms during the shooting season. I have few acquaintances in the place and no friends. I do not care for the local *canaille*. And yet I cannot be always alone. It gets on my nerves. That does not suit me. That's one reason for your presence here."

“There are others?”

“Yes; I will name one other. I like you. Some of my previous visitors, or lodgers, I did not like, and so got rid of them when I tired of their company. They went away without notice to quit.” Viancani smiled grimly.

“I understand. You frightened them off. I know how you did it.” This was a bow drawn partly at a venture.

Viancani glanced swiftly under his heavy eyebrows at Marshall. It was a sudden and a startled glance. But the Englishman's face was as easily read as an open book, and what the master of the house read in it seemed to please him. The subject was immediately changed and never afterwards alluded to by either. One thing Marshall began to see more clearly as time passed—the friendship of the hermit of Letterfrack was really sincere.

They were a curious pair of friends: the one a mere boy, thinking only of sport, health, every passing pretty girl, and of castles in Spain—purposeless; the other, an old man, though his hair was still coal-black, full of the knowledge of books, versed in the topics of every capital in Europe,

and living in a ruined house on a Connemara moor the better to safeguard his great purpose. Two months they lived thus as friends, and Marshall forgot his repugnance to the hideous Bridget and hardly noticed the growing influence over him which Viancani seemed to gain without striving for.

There was also another influence which helped to keep Marshall in Connemara besides Viancani and his moor, and his splendid mountains—Norah O'Connor, postal and telegraph clerk at Letterfrack. In most of the smaller Irish country towns and in the larger villages the telegraph clerk is a girl, and nearly always a good-looking girl. She has a fixed salary from the Government, and perquisites in the shape of the good wishes of the police in the larger villages, and the patronage of the bank clerks in the smaller towns. She is an American "school marm" *in excelsis*. Norah was a tall, handsome girl, with blue-black hair and bright blue eyes. She had been told by commercial travellers that she was the handsomest girl in Connaught, and had accepted their evidence as valid.

It was a pleasant change for Frank Marshall,

after a long day on the dreary moors, to drop into the post-office for his letters and find himself actually within arm's-length of a real telegraphic instrument and sometimes within less than that of the telegraphist. Norah had been sternly patriotic before the young Englishman came to the House on the Moor, but after his arrival she took a broader view of politics, and before he was there a month she was cosmopolitan. Marshall's dress, appearance, and manner were a revelation to the simple Irish girl. He won her heart so easily that at first he was inclined to value his conquest lightly. He changed his mind later.

They were walking, Norah and Marshall, one evening during the hour which Norah had "off," after the despatch of the evening mail. It was a dull, grey winter evening. Signs of a coming storm were plentiful. The clouds were hurrying landward from the ocean, and the seabirds were crying distraught. The mountain tops had disappeared in mists and the moor was deserted. The haggard denizens of the bogs had huddled into their draughty cabins, and the solitude was complete. This intense loneliness of scene oppressed Norah. She walked silently by

Marshall's side without making any effort to combat the gloomy influence of the Connemara wilderness. At last Marshall said suddenly :

"A penny for your thoughts." He did not altogether understand the girl's silence, because he knew nothing of the strange alternative merriness or melancholy of the Celtic character, so mercurial, so electric—the Irish barometer itself is not more changeable.

"A penny is not much, but I cannot charge you for what is yours already," Norah answered demurely, and with only the merest twinkle in her blue eyes. Her mood had already changed. Then, as he was about to interrupt, she put her right hand in his and said with an earnestness that was pathetic :

"Frank Marshall, if you care for me as much as you have told me, you will leave the House on the Moor at once."

"My dear child, the House on the Moor is all right. Don't mind the local gossips."

"I don't mind the gossips, but I do mind the queer telegrams Viancani gets every day in the week, and the letters with foreign stamps and post-marks, and other things."

"What sort of telegrams are they?"

"Oh, I shouldn't have said that—I have broken a regulation——"

"My dear little Government official, I shall not report you. And don't worry about Viancani and his telegrams. They don't concern me. Now we're getting close to the village, I'll say good evening. No, you are not going off like that. It's quite dark. No one can see. Only one? Rubbish! Half a dozen at the very least!"

Viancani was waiting on the lawn for Marshall. The paying guest was very late in arriving at the Moor House, for after seeing Norah O'Connor into Letterfrack he had visited the protestant clergyman, the parish priest, and lastly the District Inspector of Police. It was after twelve o'clock when Marshall opened the rusty gate and strode up the short avenue. He found Viancani strangely excited, and evidently under the influence of drink—a thing without precedent. It was soon evident that whatever stimulants Viancani had taken, his extraordinary excitement was mainly owing to mental trouble. It is true that he had been drinking the poisonous poteen of the neighbourhood in default of a more palatable substitute, and

the effect of this on a man unaccustomed to it is not agreeable to the drinker himself, or anyone in his vicinity.

"I thought you would never come," Viancani said with a gasp. "The hag—as you call her—Bridget, has gone to her grandchild. There is no one in the house but myself and that beast of a cat. I think I'll shoot it. I detest the thing. Come in, I am feeling devilish low. I wish you would sit with me for an hour."

"An hour? Oh, certainly!"

Viancani led the way to a large room in which Marshall had never been previously, explaining that the whole house was upset by the industry of some women whom he had brought in to effect a complete cleaning. To this annual visitation Bridget had a conscientious objection, and she had many times proved her courage in her own convictions by postponing the early spring cleaning until the late autumn. When the inevitable arrived she usually went to visit her grandchild until the sacrilege was over.

There was no carpet on the floor. The footsteps of the two men sounded loudly on the bare boards. Furniture of all sorts, chairs, tables, desks, and

pictures were piled indiscriminately in one corner. The ceiling was discoloured with damp, and broken in many places, and the plaster hung ominously in detached slices ready to fall on the least provocation. Great dust-choked cobwebs, whose owning spiders were long since dead, hung in a gruesome arras to the cornices. The place was nothing better than a lumber-room, and not good enough for that. Marshall heartily wished himself elsewhere—anywhere out of Connaught. It suggested the other place.

Viancani sheltered with his hand the candle he was carrying from the strong draught which blew freshly through the room. As no candlestick was forthcoming, he jammed the candle roughly into the neck of an empty poteen bottle, breaking it midway in the process. The upper half hung over and guttered down on the table. So far every detail seemed fitting—a complement to the whole surroundings. One artistic touch remained to complete the picture. It was competently supplied by the uninvited presence of Bridget's cat.

The cat came in unpretentiously, and calmly approached the master of the house. He sprang to his feet with a scream, and hurled his tumbler

at it. The tumbler missed its mark, and was shattered against the wall, while the cat jumped through the window with an ugly crash of broken glass.

"Thank God it's gone!" Viancani said in a broken voice, drying his dripping forehead. "Have a drink."

"I will; but I can't touch that stuff. Try this. Marshall produced a full flask and set it on the table.

"Drink your own and I'll drink mine. I prefer it. It bites. And I have a story to tell you."

"It is very late, and I am tired out. To-morrow night."

"Not to-morrow night. This night. I may not be able to tell my story to-morrow night, or you might not be able to listen to it. It shall be to-night or not at all."

"Then to-night, by all means," Marshall agreed with a pretence at cheerfulness which he was far from feeling. Norah O'Connor's warning against the House on the Moor and its master was becoming painfully prominent in his mind. But something impelled him to put on a bold face. He

took a pull from his flask, lit a cigar, stretched out his legs comfortably, and said: "Fire away."

Viancani helped himself from the poteen bottle. His hand shook liberally in pouring out the liquor, and the drink he mixed was proportionately strong. He began in a maundering way to tell some rambling story in which scientific names and personages became so mixed up that neither he himself nor his listener could follow the thread of the narrative. He was simply talking against time, and Marshall knew it. At last, after an interminable maze of utterly unconnected interpolations, Viancani arose unsteadily to his feet, and said coherently: "Here's your health, Marshall. If I die to-night I hope you will say the best you can for me."

Die! Rubbish!"

"If I die to-night," Viancani repeated calmly, "I hope you will say what is fair about me."

"I will say what is true."

"And that is——?"

"That you have treated me well, and that I considered you not merely an intelligent but an intellectual man."

"That's enough. I want no more. And if you die to-night——?"

"For heaven's sake, drop this. You are giving me the creeps all over. I am not going to die to-night, if it's all the same to you. Watch that candle. It will be out of the bottle if you don't fix it."

The chill night sent in a freezing breath through the window, and the cobweb arras flapped. Viancani re-adjusted the candle and said quietly:

"I am old, and I am—but it does not now matter about me. As to you, many a man as young and strong as you has gone to bed in his whole health at night, and been found dead in the morning! Aye! with his throat cut from ear to ear!"

"Your conversation is interesting and amusing," Marshall said sharply; "but I shall go to bed and take my chance. Good night!"

On that Viancani broke down completely. "For God's sake, don't leave me," he cried. "I am not fit to face this night alone. Let's sleep together."

The Englishman knew that he was alone in a lonely house with a man who was evidently and almost confessedly mad. He temporised, and said in the calmest voice he could command:

"Very well; go to your room, get your things,

and bring them to mine." Then they parted, each going his own way.

As Marshall groped his way—Viancani had taken the candle—through the dreary corridors to his room, his physical courage, which was strong when he was in normal health, gave way. He hurried to the room, and, having locked the door, he undressed hastily. He was in bed and feigning sleep when Viancani came.

"Marshall! Marshall!"

But Marshall only snored. Viancani hammered loudly at the door. No answer was given. Then the hammering stopped. The woodwork began to creak. Viancani was forcing the door.

Now if Marshall had not been out of health he would have straightway leaped from his bed and opened the door to stand his chance with the man behind it whom he believed a maniac. Or he would have done something to secure the door. As it was, he did nothing. He lay breathless, perspiring greatly and altogether unnerved.

Viancani strained at the door. It resisted stoutly. The house was not jerry-built. This went on for some minutes, and then something terrible happened in the outer room. A pan-

demonium of shrieks and yells and snarlings began, so horrible that Marshall's bursting heart nearly stopped. Viancani's voice could now and then be heard, but mostly there was a worrying guttural broken by the yap of a yelping cur, and over all the ringing scream of Bridget's cat sounded shrilly. The din ended in a hideous yell, and then there was the sound of a body falling heavily against the door. The lower half bulged inward three inches, and underneath a small dark stream trickled into the room. A streak of watery moonlight showed that.

Would the door hold?

High over the Moor House curlews piped on their nightly flight. Teal and widgeon whirred past and sometimes the wail of a startled peewit could be heard. All night long Frank Marshall lay in a sickly sweat, watching the lower half of his bedroom door—the half which bulged inward—and the dark streak that was on the floor. Towards morning his watch ended. The lock gave at last and the door banged back against the wall. There was a dull slapping smack of something limp striking the floor. A man's arm was stretched into the room.

Marshall lost consciousness.

When Bridget came in the morning she found her cat dead—worried to death—in Marshall's sitting-room, her master lying dead, with his throat cut, in the open doorway of the adjoining bedroom, and the Englishman himself apparently in a fit in his bed. She went straightway to Letterfrack and informed the police. It was the only thing she could do, and the most sensible thing as well.

When Frank Marshall fully recovered consciousness he found himself in the constabulary barracks of Letterfrack, and was informed that he must consider himself under arrest pending the coroner's inquest which would take place at once. Marshall was still too ill to act or think for himself. Fortunately for him a certain Government official did both. She telegraphed to his brother, giving all the particulars she could gather, which included the fact that a number of empty poison bottles had been found by the police in the House on the Moor, and on receipt of this message Charlie Marshall wired immediately to the well-known toxicologist, Surgeon-Colonel Hedford, who was then in Cork, begging him to proceed at once to Letterfrack.

The toxicologist had been working at a very

cobwebby clue in the mission with which he had been entrusted by the Premier, and to his own surprise his investigations, the farther he pursued them, seemed to point to hydrophobia as the cause of death in each of the few cases into which he had so far inquired. There had been the extreme nervous irritability, spasmodic contractions of the muscles, high temperature with fever and delirium, extensive salivation and so on; but with these were mixed up further symptoms which puzzled the Specialist and led him sometimes to doubt, and, on further reflection, to deny his doubt. He had just got to the point of guessing at the combined effect of the hydrophobic bacillus with that of some other disease unknown to medical science, when Charlie Marshall's telegram, with its muddled mention of poison bottles, reached him. That settled the question for the moment. He would take a holiday.

A plain poison case is a great recreation to a puzzled toxicologist.

Before Hedford arrived at Letterfrack the inquest on Viancani had been held, but the evidence was so inconclusive that an open verdict had been returned. The police, however, were not satisfied,

and a magisterial investigation was pending. The Specialist was permitted to examine the House on the Moor, and by great good fortune he found an underground cellar which, so far, no one had noticed, chiefly because no one had been looking for it. This apartment had been converted into a sort of dog kennel. In it were not only dogs, but cats, rabbits, and even birds, most of them scarred, wounded, dying, or dead. Of those still alive nearly all were in different stages of hydrophobia—hydrophobia with a difference. Here also were found letters from all the countries on the Continent asking for more lymph. The envelopes bore the postmarks of the various countries from which they had been despatched, but the letters were without addresses or signatures. Many of the strange telegrams, too, which Norah O'Connor had thought uncanny, were discovered, and District Inspector Boyle made a large seizure, while Hedford himself had lighted, by the most extraordinary chance, on the solution of a great mystery.

Viancani's vocation lay in the manufacture of the virus of hydrophobia, the effect of which, when administered to a human subject, would be partially

disguised by the simultaneous introduction of an intrinsically innocuous bacillus, over the origin of which Surgeon-Colonel Hedford is now unremittingly engaged. Pasteur had foreseen this combination, and there were many letters from him to Viancani, the tenor of which proved that the great French bacteriologist had written in good faith and under the impression that he was addressing a scientist as sincere and humanitarian as he was himself. Finger rings were found modelled after the fashion of those of the Borgias, which may be seen in the museum at Florence. Death from the prick of these rings when charged with Viancani's virus was certain sooner or later. It might be two, four, or six months from the date of inoculation. But the fate of the victim was secure. The master of the House on the Moor did business with secret societies whose object was the removal of obnoxious persons.

Frank Marshall and Norah O'Connor went to see the House on the Moor before it was pulled down by order of the landlord. They were walking silently side by side, and Frank, who was overdue in England, was wondering whether it would

be better to have a dramatic parting scene by the Atlantic shore with the blue-eyed colleen, or to promise correspondence, in the course of which he could easily pick a quarrel and drop it. He was now in good health. A very simple remark settled the whole matter.

"Of course you will write to me," Marshall said somewhat humbly.

"Write to you? What do you mean?"

"You see I have to go back—I——"

There was a long pause and then Norah said hotly, "Oh yes, I see—all."

And not a word more would she speak. She turned from him and bade him go his own way. The Celtic blood was surging in her heart. She looked down upon him with the inherited scorn of a thousand Irish kings when he followed her and begged hard for mercy. But he prayed so pitifully, she could not long resist, and the end of it was that in a few weeks Father Murphy officiated and then they both sailed away to England.

And that was the best way.

VII.—MAJOR RAYMOND'S MESALLIANCE.

MAJOR RAYMOND'S mésalliance was a blow to his relatives, and an outrage on those of his friends who were spinsters. After twenty years' service, mostly in India, Major Raymond was left a legacy. It was not very large, but it was ample for a man who had spent his life in the genteel poverty of "a hundred a year and his pay." On receiving this windfall the Major resigned and returned to England. His property lay about ten miles from Winterbury—a large cathedral city which had nothing in it or about it to recommend it above any cathedral city. Its society, of course, included its bishop, and its major and minor clergy, with their wives and families, not to speak of the officers of the garrison and their incumbrances.

The number of well-dressed girls possessing

attractive faces and figures, great loyalty to the Royal Family in politics, and unswerving orthodoxy in Ritual, to be met at all social functions in Winterbury can hardly be claimed as a special feature, considering that the genus is incidental to cathedral life. Major Raymond went to the cathedral city immediately after his return to England and stayed there longer than he had intended because the mills of British Law, following a high precedent, grind slowly if they grind exceeding small. Meantime the Major put up at the best hotel in the place and made the acquaintance of Winnie Mostyn.

Winnie was one of the "young ladies" in the buffet. She was a fair-haired, blue-eyed girl of eighteen or nineteen, rather handsome, very gentle mannered, very sensitive, very easily pleased and very easily hurt. She was not, therefore, specially suited for the buffet of the Royal. How she came there—but that doesn't matter here.

After disposing of his business with his lawyer in the morning, Major Raymond used to drop in to Winnie's sanctum—she had a little counter all to herself—and have something to wash down his lunch. He liked Winnie from the first. The girl

kept her own place and made others do the same. Very soon the Major respected as well as liked her. Her position was often full of difficulty. Her hours were disgraceful. Altogether, her work would have been arduous to a healthy navvy.

But Winnie never grumbled; never seemed to think it strange that all the day long, all the year round, she must work on—on—and the strong men who lolled in her bar had nothing better to do than smoke and drink—and be rude to her when out of humour. Of course they were not always rude. Indeed she had a little band of admirers who brought her flowers—which sometimes must have cost them a number of pence—and posed as philanthropists for the rest of the day.

It could not, of course, be expected that when these gentlemen met with reverses in business, social functions, cards, or on the turf, that they would not dump their grievances on little blue-eyes. It was so easy—so satisfying—and so safe. Once a brawny seafaring man wanted to clear out the bar, only the girl restrained him—but that does not concern the story either.

Major Raymond began to pity Winnie, and Winnie began to count the hours of each day till

lunch time. And when the Major, whose moustache was as white as the Commander-in-Chief's, and whose complexion was leathern, dropped in, her blue eyes beamed with happiness. The girl forgot she was tired; her laugh became genuine.

One afternoon her friend had a cup of tea from her—her own tea; he had not to pay for it. That was a great day. She did not mind the local loafers that evening. She hardly heard their coarse jests.

Then the greatest day of all came. It was brought about accidentally by some harmless chaff concerning a new dress and a drive. The drive was conceivable, but when the dress was mentioned—and mentioned in a way which, if not serious, presented an excellent imitation of sincerity—Winnie drew back. She could not bear that her friend should think her mean. But as the Major was never at ease when he had passed his word, be it in jest or earnest, until his promise was fulfilled, the dress was eventually bought, after much disputation, and the drive came off without further remonstrance.

Winnie was rather frightened at first, and was not sure that it was quite right. Still, it was a

great thing to be taken for a drive by an army officer and a real gentleman like Major Raymond. A young woman in the outer bar—whom the Major called the “Yellow Girl,” owing to her dyed hair—was furiously jealous as Winnie passed out for her half-holiday of an hour and a quarter.

The drive was a glorious success—all but its closing scene. Winnie, bright-eyed and rosy-cheeked from the fresh air and the happiness of the short respite, was returning to her duties. The “Yellow Girl” called to her as she passed, and whispered something.

Winnie started suddenly, turned crimson, and burst into tears. The yellow savage laughed scornfully. Winnie’s happiness was over. She would never drive out with the Major again. Her half-holiday of an hour and a quarter had cost her dear—very nearly her self-respect. Homeopathy in happiness has many physicians—and many victims.

By-and-by Major Raymond dropped in to see Winnie after dinner, as well as after lunch. This was not so pleasant for the Major. The men were rougher and ruder than the early *habités*. Raymond had glimpses now and then of the hell

the girl's life sometimes was. He worried himself over it. The puzzle of how to help her was still unsolved when the climax came.

It was the evening of the Winterbury races. Major Raymond, driven from room to room by the crush, bethought himself of Winnie. She must be terribly busy. He would just look in for a moment to see how she was doing. Strange that this veteran, who had long decided that society was a bore and cantonment festivities a snare and a delusion, should trouble himself about a common bar-girl slaving her soul away, or care a straw whether her heart broke sooner or later in the process. But he did care.

Winnie's bar was oppressive with tobacco smoke, and packed with men shouting at the top of their voices or roaring with imbecile laughter. The girl was ghastly white. The work was dreadful. Half a dozen men were leaning over the counter, chaffing—that is, baiting—her. They were behaving with dreadful cruelty—worse than the average man in his cups; that is, as unlike average beasts as possible. The poor girl was trying bravely to keep a bold face and hold her own. But six strong men to a nervous girl is cruel

odds, especially when the men are all drunk and the girl on the point of hysteria.

Now Major Raymond was a gallant man, but he flinched just then, and he was turning away when the girl saw him. The flash of ineffable relief in her eyes was enough. His very presence gave her courage. The blood came back to her face. Her friend was near.

Making his way to the counter, the Major stumbled over one of the men's feet which were spread out regardless of space.

"Where the devil are you going?" the man snapped viciously.

"Where the devil I please," the Major answered, affably as to the words, but with a glare into the man's eyes that ended the conversation on the spot.

An hour later Major Raymond whispered, "I am afraid I must go now. If I remain any longer I shall certainly finish the evening in the hands of the police."

"It was worse before you came," was all she replied. His presence was really something of a protection. Still she would not pointedly ask him to remain.

On that the Major sat down again and sipped chartreuse for two hours from purely humanitarian motives. When the last customer, except himself, was gone, and the gas lights were being turned down, the Major's head was not so cool, nor his judgment so clear as usual. And when the inevitable reaction swept over the girl, and she burst into a passionate fit of weeping, he leant over the counter and patted her shoulder with his hand, and begged her to bear up, telling her truly that the other girls were watching her.

Whereupon the poor little tear-daubed face was turned to him in wild appeal. The tired heart could bear no more.

"For God's sake take me out of this," she wailed.

Some days later, when they were driving down the principal street in Winterbury on their way to the railway station, a thought struck Winnie as they were passing the Royal. It was a vengeful little thought, although the vengeance was venial.

"May I run in just for a moment?" she asked eagerly.

"Of course you may. And don't look at me

in that absurdly idolatrous fashion, sweetheart," the Major answered.

The cab was stopped. Winnie alighted. She tripped smartly into the buffet—hideous place—and ran to the "Yellow Girl's" counter.

"There!" she cried, slapping a visiting card on the counter.

The "Yellow Girl" took it up and read: "Major and Mrs. Raymond."

Winnie returned to the cab triumphant. As they drove to the station, she explained what she had done.

"What a spiteful little woman it is after all!" her husband said playfully. "Why all this triumph?"

"It was she—the 'Yellow Girl'—who said—who—you remember——"

"Oh, I see it now. You were quite right—quite. I am glad you gave her the card," the Major said deliberately.

They travelled by easy stages for a couple of months in France, Switzerland, and Italy. It was a glorious honeymoon for Winnie—a lifetime of happy holidays to a girl who had been physically tired for years: courtesy instead of cruelty; con-

stant tenderness in lieu of continued insult. It was unbelievable! It was too much!

When they returned to England and set up house in a quiet suburb in the north of London, the Major's friends—men friends—called loyally. But the spinsters and their relatives kept aloof, and as for Winterbury, from the bishop on his throne to the humblest curate, the Church declared Major Raymond and his wife "impossible."

Even with the men friends it was the old story. The same men rarely came twice. This was not owing to any glaring social solecism on the part of Mrs. Raymond. On the contrary, the child-wife behaved admirably. But she was not *au courant* with society slang, and so was often at a loss. These painful crises distressed Major Raymond, more especially from the obvious, if chivalrous, efforts of the men friends to cover the retreat of their hostess. The Major would not have his wife pitied by his friends. He would see them to the deuce first. He received them more and more coolly, and finally gave them the cold shoulder. Then he had peace and happiness for a time. And then the end came.

Winnie saw the friends drop off one by one.

She saw her husband grow gradually abstracted—then moody. She made desperate efforts to please. Soon these seemed to surfeit. She broke her heart in solitary weeping, and so grew wan and white. This gave offence.

And thus they lived together—the man cursing himself for a hide-bound ass who could not, try how he would, shake himself free from the shackles of a narrow conventionalism, the rigid laws of which he had dared to disobey: the woman praying day and night for the happiness of the saviour who had brought her no salvation.

Sometimes they defied their fate, and made pleasant little excursions into the country, walking in green lanes happily. Or they went to unfrequented seaside places, where on golden sands the man forgot his lost social status, and the still small voice that was wearing the woman's life away was drowned in the roar of the sea.

All the man's friends had now fallen away, and the two were alone. It is not good for man to be alone—even a married man. Major Raymond became morose. Winnie lost her good looks. Her figure shrank. Then there came an invitation to the Major from the friend who had

stood longest by him. It was to share a fortnight's shooting in Inverness. Almost on her knees Winnie begged her husband to accept it. It would be good for him.

She was so unaffected and sincere that the Major yielded, in reality more to please her than himself. For he believed that, although while he was away she would fret a little in his absence, her loneliness would be overpaid by the satisfaction of the strong sense of duty she had always shown. So the Major went on his visit, and wondered very much whether his wife thought he was going to a frontier war instead of a fortnight's shooting in Inverness, so completely did she break down at the last moment. He could not recall his acceptance of the invitation, or he would have done so then and there. As it was, he will recollect with thankfulness to the last day of his life that he was very kind and affectionate with his wife, who saw him off with tearful eyes, and a sorrow which would have appeared to be overdone if he had not known it to be true.

Winnie was then left to herself and her own thoughts. She had kept them faithfully to herself. They would have done less harm if they had been shared.

Major Raymond had a good time with his friend, an old Service comrade, and their mutual host in Inverness. The welcome change, the mixing again with half-forgotten acquaintances, the first-rate sport—all served to brighten him up wonderfully. He became something like his old self again. He was considered a good fellow. And he was a good fellow ; for all the time that he was enjoying himself on the brown moors and climbing the healthy hills and talking to fine ladies, he was planning little treats for the girl he had left at home. Sometimes when, on cresting a mountain slope, the keen air swept over him, he felt absolutely guilty. Why should he have all this and poor little blue-eyes nothing better than to count the weary hours until he would return?

One morning came a letter—a terrible letter : terrible in its pathos and passion ; awful in its complete despair. It showed that the girl had seen as clearly as her husband what the marriage really meant for him ; that it had ostracised him from his class ; that he had borne the result without complaint ; but that the burthen of the sacrifice had been too great for her to bear. Tear-stained, full of wild, incoherent sentences and declarations

of passionate love, she saw no way to free him but one. There was another way, but she would not walk in it. She would be true to him till death. So she was going out upon that last dread journey alone so that he might be no more lonely for her sake. Without a heart to pity her, without a hand to clasp hers or a voice to comfort her, she was facing the great unknowable—passing into the great unknown. He would forgive her, would he not? And perhaps pity her a little? And oh, would he remember her sometimes? Enough!

The rush of telegrams to town, the hiring of the special train, and the wild haste of preparation for departure, kept Major Raymond from going mad. His friend accompanied him. He was a true friend that one.

Before the special started, a Londoner, who was returning to town, introduced himself and offered to share the cost of the train if allowed to join them. He had been recalled by important business. Raymond said nothing, but his friend readily agreed, and the three got into the same compartment of the single carriage which was put on. The engine driver had been interviewed and the pace was fine. They could scarcely keep their

seats owing to the oscillation of the carriage. Raymond never spoke, although the Londoner several times tried to draw him into the conversation he was keeping up with his friend. At last the stranger said pointedly, although it was quite evident it was merely from a courteous anxiety to make the conversation general :

"Do you wish me to put the window up, sir?"

"I wish you were in hell," was what Major Raymond answered.

As they went flying south—dashing over the shires, sweeping round mountain bases, leaping rivers, bursting through tunnels, pounding up gradients and plunging down them—Major Raymond, who had not spoken after his one fierce rejoinder, was thinking in a circle that never changed, that always ended where it began :

"Shall I be in time? I must be in time! I will be in time! I may be late!"

And so on without variation and without relief. It was over at last. They were in London. They were driving through the streets. They were at the door. The two men paused and faced each other. Raymond could not do it. The friend understood his sign. He rang. The door was

opened by the housekeeper. Her face was enough. All was over.

The housekeeper led the way and the two men followed, moving cautiously, as those do who fear to break the fitful slumber of an ailing child.

At the door of the bedroom, Raymond turned and said to his friend :

"You must go now. I thank you."

But the friend answered, "I may not go yet. And you must give me this before you go in." He put out his hand to take the revolver he had seen Major Raymond put in his pocket. This was not allowed.

"No," said Raymond, "I cannot give you that."

"Very well," said his friend, "then I go in with you."

They did go in together, leaving the housekeeper sobbing at the door.

"Can anything be done—can you do anything?" The man who spoke choked with a schoolgirl sob.

"No," said his friend, "nothing can now be done. She is dead. She has been dead some hours. She has taken——"

"Stop!" Major Raymond interrupted, "that will

do. You are a great authority in this business, but I do not wish to hear you lecture just now."

The dead girl was dressed in the gown he had bought for her: the one she had worn on the first grand day in her life; the day an army officer took her for a drive.

A scrap of paper lay on the dressing-table. She had tried to write at the last moment. The writing was not easy to read. One line only was fairly decipherable. She had concentrated the last of her vitality to make it plain. It ran:—

"If you do not live and be happy for my sake I have done this thing in vain."

Raymond and his friend sat together through the night. And when the dawn came the friend spoke and asked for a promise. For an answer the stricken man smoothed out the paper which he had held in his hand all through the night, and read aloud the last line.

"That will do," said the friend, "I shall leave you now."

When Surgeon-Colonel Hedford reached the corner of the terrace he stopped and lit a cigar. The morning air was cold, and his hand shook

as he held the match. He looked back toward the house he had just quitted, and almost failed to distinguish it from the others in the row, so much alike were they all.

"I suppose," said he, "they have all got their own story to tell. I wish to Heaven there was not so much misery in the world, or that a little less of it came my way."

Major Raymond remains a widower.

VIII.—THE SMART LANE CASE.

GEOFFREY NEWTON, managing director of the firm of Newton, Langley, and Brown, stockbrokers and financial agents, was sitting in his private office in Smart Lane, and reading for the third time a cablegram from Johannesburg. The message consisted of two words: "Buy blankets."

Newton did not require blankets just then for his household, and when he wanted them for public purposes, as he did once a year, shortly before Christmas, for distribution among the deserving poor in the borough he meant to represent in Parliament (and a few paragraphs in the local papers), he bought them wholesale from a London firm, without the expense of a cablegram from Johannesburg or elsewhere. Mr. Newton slowly folded up the telegram, and put it in his pocket. Then he touched the button of his electric bell,

and his managing clerk, William Grant, opened the door of the private office.

"What are Hammerstein Gold Mines this morning, Mr. Grant?"

"Two and five-eighths premium, and going up."

"How many do we hold?"

"Five thousand debentures, five thousand preference, and ten thousand ordinary," the managing clerk answered.

"Sell thirty thousand ordinary to-day and to-morrow, cautiously, and work off the debenture and preference."

"But, sir, Hammersteins are going up. They are the best thing in the market," Grant was beginning in a deprecating voice, when Mr. Newton interrupted:

"Do as I direct."

On that the managing clerk bowed and withdrew without another word. When he got to his desk he reflected that if his chief—a man of blood and iron in the financial world—choose to sell Hammersteins in a rising market, there must be some good reason for selling that particular stock. So he sold a thousand on his own account, in addition to what he had been instructed to sell

for his firm. And as he had been instructed to act cautiously, he began his "operation" by advising a fellow-clerk, Stephen Moore, with whom he was on friendly terms, to buy largely—commencing with, say, a thousand. Moore did buy to that extent. Grant was thus proceeding cautiously.

Before these friends left the office in the evening, Grant noticed that Moore took from his desk a canvas bag which jingled suggestively in the handling.

"Hallo! Moore. Been robbing a bank?" he asked jocularly.

"Oh, no; 'only cashing a cheque. A friend of mine, an engineer, who is going to South Africa, sent it to me by post to meet him with the cash at Charing Cross. He sails to-morrow by the 'Kinfauns Castle,'" Moore answered.

"I don't mind if I go with you to the station," Grant volunteered.

"I shall be very glad if you will," Moore returned. "It is a consummate nuisance, this business of seeing off a friend, when 'one is alone. It is a sort of funeral party with 'one chief mourner, and I have a strong objection to the part. See me through it!"

"Certainly."

On their way to Charing Cross, Grant asked casually :

"Why is your friend going out? Most fellows, of the age you tell me he is, only leave this benighted country when it gets too hot to hold them. What's your friend's besetting sin?"

"Betting."

"Ah! that's serious—I mean shady."

"It is," said Moore, "quite as shady as our own job."

"I beg your pardon?" Grant interjected.

"I said 'as shady as our own job,'" Moore reiterated. "But I was not quite correct. It is not as shady as our scheme. I do not mean that a bet on a stock, or a bet on a cargo, is intrinsically more shady than a bet on a horse, or that a fortune made on 'Change' is less respectable than a fortune made on the turf. Quite the contrary. But from an ethical point of view we are simply nowhere." Moore was now well started on the subject he had made a hobby. "Some horse races are fairly run, and in most there are so many animals going that any accident may happen. Any horse may be compelled to win even if he was not 'meant.' In

our deals you know there are only two horses—the rise and the fall—and we don't bet until we know the other horse is poisoned. Isn't that so?"

"I don't like your way of putting it."

"I don't myself, but I don't see how my way of putting it alters the case."

Grant's face darkened for a moment. Then his temper seemed restored. He stopped as they were passing a café, and said, "Let's have a cup of coffee. I am thirsty." Moore agreed, as there was still plenty of time to meet the train.

"I saw you at the Strawmarket last night with Miss Van Alstyne and her mother. You seem to be going strong in that quarter."

"It isn't going very strong to bring a girl to whom I am engaged—accompanied by her mother—to a theatre for an evening." Moore answered slowly and with a deliberation which was evidently intentional.

"Engaged? You engaged to Miss Van Alstyne?"

"Why not?"

"Why not?" Grant muttered, with the ugly dark shadow again on his face. "Wish you joy."

"Thank you. You were always a good fellow."

Moore said this with a perceptible effort after cordiality, for Grant's manner was rather chilling in spite of his friendly congratulation. But the managing clerk recovered his good humour in a moment, and he ordered two more cups of coffee in a bantering way, declaring that if he could not drink to the future Mrs. Moore in champagne he would pledge her in the only liquor available. Moore was flattered by the professed good-will, and then Grant, who in his own way talked well, began an animated conversation. He joked about everything; the "man in the street," the state of the market—shop will always come in sooner or later where shopmen converse—politics, the weather, and so on. Moore's coffee was cold before he thought of it. Grant drew his attention to it. He drank the coffee off, and they parted with expressions of mutual esteem, Grant having recollected that he had forgotten an engagement. Moore immediately called a hansom and told the man to drive to Charing Cross.

Next morning, Stephen Moore did not arrive at the office in Smart Lane. His friend Mortimer, the engineer, called. Mortimer was agitated, and spoke in some excitement. The managing clerk

Mr. Grant, was promptly informed of the visit—excited strangers were no novelty in the office of Newton, Langley, and Brown—and directed that the gentleman should be shown into Mr. Newton's room, which the junior clerks had nicknamed "Bedlam." Mr. Newton listened to the engineer's story with a show of sympathy, but with the air of a man who was determined not to "give the firm away," or any of its officials.

"It is very strange," Mr. Newton said cautiously; "Mr. Moore left this office yesterday in his usual health and at the usual hour. I understand that he took with him a bag of gold containing three hundred sovereigns, which he said he was to hand over to you at Charing Cross. Mr. Grant, my managing clerk, walked part of the way with him, and when they separated Moore had plenty of time to meet your train."

"I can't understand it," Mortimer interrupted.

"You do not, of course, suspect him of having absconded." There was a blunt directness in this which embarrassed Mortimer.

"Not at all. It is the last thing in the world I would suspect Stephen Moore of doing. Perhaps you would give me his address, and——"

"I have already sent to his address. My messenger will be back in half an hour."

"If you do not mind giving me his address, I will go there myself," Mortimer said, with some asperity.

"Certainly ; I do not mind." Mr. Newton rang, and when the bell was answered, he dismissed Mortimer with a stiff bow, saying : " This gentleman will attend to you."

When Mortimer and Grant, who volunteered to accompany him, arrived at No. 4, Mornington Crescent, where Moore had rooms, they learned that the lodger had not been home on the previous night. " And he's never before been a night out of the house since he came to live here. Most regular in his hours is Mr. Moore, I will say that for him." This was the landlady's evidence.

"What do you think of it now?" Grant asked, when Mortimer and he were again in the street.

"It's very strange."

"It's very suspicious."

Mortimer looked at Grant, and said coldly :

"It is rather mysterious, but I don't yet admit that it is suspicious in the sense you appear to mean. It will likely cause me to miss my ship."

"Are you going alone?" Grant asked, with a sneer.

"Yes, I am going alone."

"I shouldn't, if I were you. It's a bit of a risk. A man with your unbounded confidence in human nature is likely to get into trouble—by himself."

Mortimer looked suddenly in the speaker's face. Grant returned the stare with composure. The engineer thereupon turned on his heel without a word, and left the managing clerk standing on the street.

The "Kinfauns Castle" sailed without one of its intended passengers. Mortimer had to sell some stock which the ravages of the turf had still left to him, in order to raise the funds necessary for the voyage. This took time. While he was waiting for the next vessel, he tried to discover his friend Moore, but failed. It was fortunate, however, that in the meantime Moore had discovered himself. He accomplished this about noon on the day after he had lost himself. To be exact, at a quarter to twelve o'clock on that morning Stephen Moore awoke from a deep sleep and did so with a nervous start which nearly threw him out of a strange bed in a room which he had never

seen before. He sat up in the bed and, as his dazed senses came slowly back, he recognised in stupid bewilderment that he had gone to bed in his clothes. This, being something of a Philistine, he regarded as disreputable, and he wondered feebly how he had come to act with so much freedom from conventionality. After a minute or two he noticed his overcoat neatly folded on a chair. And he had taken off his hat! This gave him some consolation. Civilisation still held him, albeit with the last links of a long chain.

Moore arose from the bed and moved cautiously towards the chair on which his overcoat was placed, for his head was throbbing fiercely, and the room was swaying with a motion more trying than that of a ship at sea to a bad sailor. The chair eluded him smartly several times. It dived under his arm and came up on the other side with the agility of a prize-fighter. At last he caught it, and shaking out the folds of the overcoat he plunged his hand into the left side pocket where he had carried the bag of gold. The pocket was empty.

The man threw himself back on the bed and tried to think—to concentrate all his mental power on the effort. The result was not satisfactory.

All he could remember was getting into a cab and telling the driver to take him to Charing Cross. Soon after, the long parallel lines of lamps, he remembered, began to form themselves into the sides of a brilliant triangle, the apex of which seemed miles away. Then the buildings on either hand leant over toward each other, and fell upon him—he could remember no more. Some one knocked at the bedroom door. A slovenly waiter entered.

“Where am I?” Moore asked weakly.

“Abercorn, York Road, sir.”

“When and how did I come here?”

“As to the when, sir, last night, ten o’clock. As to the ’ow, sir! ’Scuse me. ’Ope you’re all right, sir. Slept it hoff?”

“Bring the proprietor,” Moore said as sharply as his low state enabled him. When the owner of the house came, Moore explained briefly that he had been robbed of £300 and asked for a policeman.

“You were not robbed of your £300 here, that’s certain,” the hotel-keeper replied with heat. “And as for sending for a policeman, if I had seen you last night in the condition I am told you were

brought in I would have sent *you* to the police-station."

"Beg pardon, sir, the cabby who brought the gentleman 'ere is downstairs. Wants 'is fare, sir." This was delivered apologetically from the corridor by the shabby waiter.

The cabman was brought up. His story was straightforward and apparently truthful. He had driven to Charing Cross as directed. Arrived there his fare refused to alight and said "Paddington." Fare would not get out there either. Drove to several other railway stations and, finally, not wishing to see a man who was evidently a gentleman "getting the horfice" he drove him to the Abercorn, where the shabby William and he did a little business in this line unknown to the proprietor.

That was all the cabman could tell, so Moore, who had found the contents of his purse untouched, took his number and paid him liberally. It was three days before Stephen Moore was strong enough to leave the Abercorn, and when on the morning of the third day he got to the office in Smart Lane he found that the march of events had left him very far behind in his absence.

Mr. Newton was out, and the managing clerk

received the delinquent with an air of frigid courtesy which was not reassuring. Moore told his story through without a single word of comment from his auditor, and when it was finished Grant said coldly :

"It is probable that the cabby, hearing the jingle of the coin as you got into his cab, chloroformed you. A sponge on the end of a stick thrust through the trap would do the business in a couple of minutes."

"But why then, did he run the risk of turning up to ask for a paltry fare when he had £300? That's a point you overlook."

"It is," Grant answered, deliberately; "and it is a point I would recommend you to overlook. Don't insist upon it. Can't you see that I am speaking as your friend?"

"Then it is as my friend that you deliberately suggest, as you have plainly done, that I stole the money."

"I suggest nothing. Good morning. You will find a letter from the firm at your lodgings. You had better be out of this when Mr. Newton returns."

Moore retired sorely humiliated, almost beaten. Three letters awaited him at his lodgings: one

was from the firm of Newton and Co., summarily dismissing him from its employment; the second was from Miss Van Alstyne unconditionally releasing him from his engagement; and the third was from a firm in Smart Lane, in which Mr. Newton's clerks did their private business. The last intimated that Hammersteins had fallen so heavily, the firm would require security if Mr. Moore wished his operation carried over.

The dismissed clerk hardly gave a thought to the first and third communications. He was in misfortune, and it was only natural—at least, it was in keeping with the ethics of the commercial code in which he had spent the best years of his life—that he should be “unloaded” the moment the jettison of his person seemed desirable or profitable. But Miss Van Alstyne's letter was a cruel blow. The girl on whom he had wasted all the rigid loyalty of an unimaginative nature was really only a spoilt suburban belle, with fine physical curves and good flesh tints, but with very little brains and no heart at all. She liked the man well enough in her way, it is true, but the moment she found that the fulfilment of her liking might mean a sacrifice on her own part, she weighed the object

of her affections in her ill-adjusted mental balance and found him wanting. Still, she might have worded her letter a little less brutally.

The letter nearly drove Moore out of his mind, and as his disease was desperate he decided to try a desperate remedy. He wrote a note to Mr. Newton, demanding a private interview with himself and Mr. Grant at the office of the company after business hours on any convenient day they wished to name, provided it were an early one. Hammersteins had fallen seriously since he had bought at Grant's suggestion. He believed that he had been the victim of a plot, but his information as to the plot having gaps in it, he meant to play his game with as much caution as had been hitherto shown by the other side. And as he did not really know why anyone should constitute a side against him he determined to play a waiting game on that point, and a forcing game on another point. The second count in the indictment he prepared amounted to no less than the public exposure of Mr. Geoffrey Newton as a financial swindler on a large scale, and an annual forger of the company's balance-sheet. On the second count he felt secure. He had direct evidence in his

possession. He would use it, or sell it, as best suited his purpose.

This course may not argue a very high ethical standard in Stephen Moore's morality, but it must be remembered in his favour that he was in the last extremity, and that he had gained his civic education in the office of a speculating stockbroker. Having posted his letter to Newton he went to call on Mrs. Van Alstyne and her daughter.

Mrs. Van Alstyne was 'out, but the young lady consented to receive the visitor, and the visitor was unaffectedly astonished at his reception.

"Edith," he said, very humbly, "you surely did not mean what you said in that cruel note."

"Why not, Mr. Moore?" the girl replied quietly. It was a very simple remark, but the look in her eyes and the accent on the "Mr." settled everything. It was a great revelation, and it brought Moore with a jerk out of the lethargic physical condition in which he had spent three days. He paused for a few moments and when he spoke his voice was strong and determined.

"You believe me guilty of this robbery?" he asked, a little sternly.

"I do not say that. I believe you are suspected."

"And if I am innocent?"

"Prove it, by all means."

"Suppose I fail?" The girl shrugged her shoulders and did not answer.

"Suppose, then, I succeed! Suppose further that I prove Newton and his gang to be a pack of swindlers whom I will compel to pay me hush money—especially the ruffian Grant."

"Mr. Grant is no ruffian. Mr. Grant is a gentleman who would not come here as you have done to storm and rave before a defenceless girl. I wish I had listened to him when he warned me."

"Warned you—against me?"

"Yes—against you."

Moore paused for a moment, and then went on in a dry, thin voice which he steadied with difficulty :

"See here—and here—" he pulled a bundle of yellow tissue paper out of his breast pocket, and turning the pages read hastily or reeled off a host of figures which conveyed nothing tangible to the girl but which impressed her vaguely.

"Perhaps you cannot follow me, but if you could you would understand that I hold the largest London swindler and his accomplice in the hollow

of my hand, and I am going to crush them unless they pay me to keep quiet."

His manner had now a ruthless strength in it which frightened the woman and partly convinced her. She came close to him in a caressing way. He stood off.

"They will pay you, Stephen," she said softly. "You are too clever for them after all. My letter to you was not really serious. I only wanted to put you on your mettle. You are so easy going I thought it necessary. I acted for the best. You will beat them and then you will come to me."

"I will. I will throttle them, or be well paid for letting them go free. In either case I will come to you."

"You will?"

"Yes, I will—to laugh at you, and to curse you. Good night!"

On his return to his rooms, Moore found an answer from Newton. It had been sent by a special messenger, and was marked "immediate." Mr. Newton deprecated the tone in which Mr. Moore had seen fit to write; thought he had sufficient influence with the other partners to induce them to withdraw their letter of dismissal which had been

decided upon against his, Mr. Newton's, earnest advice; Mr. William Grant's strong testimony in Mr. Moore's favour; Mr. Mortimer had again called, and distinctly expressed his confidence in his friend which would certainly have weight with the partners—and so on. The letter concluded by appointing the next evening at six o'clock for the interview Moore desired, and the writer earnestly hoped that a settlement would be arrived at which would be satisfactory to all concerned.

Moore read the letter through carefully, and when he had finished it he said quietly to himself, "To make it satisfactory for me I shall require—let me see: (1) The return of the two hundred odd I dropped in buying Hammersteins on Grant's advice. (2) Grant's superannuation, and my appointment in his place. (3) A thousand down from Newton. I am not a blackmailer from choice. I am only a criminal manufactured by society, and society will always have the criminals it deserves. I think that's what Havelock Ellis says, and he has studied the subject generally. I have only had leisure for studying a phase of it."

At six o'clock next evening, Moore went to the office in Smart Lane and found Newton and Grant

waiting for him. He got to business with commendable directness. He announced the positive, comparative, and superlative items in his claim, and refused to say another word save that if any one of his conditions were rejected he would consider the consultation over, and himself at liberty to act for himself as his discretion should direct.

"Suppose, Mr. Moore," Newton said sharply, "you would discontinue this nonsense and inform me why you have detained Mr. Grant and myself this evening."

"I have informed you very explicitly."

"You have talked some rubbish, but you have informed us of nothing."

"I do not intend to inform you further. I have informed the editor of a certain journal. In fact, my information is already sold to him—subject to a better offer from you."

This was pure "bluff." But Newton and Grant turned pale. They shuffled and began to compromise. Moore paid no attention to them. They wanted to find out what he really knew and how much. They might as well have talked to the table. Fearing to convey, even by accident, the exact amount of his knowledge (which was serious,

if not absolutely conclusive) Moore maintained a rigid silence. Then Newton turned on Grant, and Grant, at last, turned on Newton. A long, wordy war was waged between the two, in which Moore's only part was to put in a word now and then which served to keep the contention keen, during the progress of which he had picked up a few dialectical trifles which helped to make his chain of evidence complete. Then he spoke:

"Gentlemen, this wrangling does not advance my business."

The two conspirators paused aghast. They had allowed their tempers to carry them away from that strict sense of duty which a first-class swindler owes to himself. They looked simultaneously at Moore with an ugly glance. Moore observed it; but he was playing his forcing game now and he meant to play it out. Unfortunately he did not know the mettle of the men with whom he was playing. They had plenty of pluck, although they proved bunglers in the end. A little learning is a dangerous thing when one deals with poisons and is fated to be confronted in the last extremity with the toxicologist whose public services have been described in these pages.

Mr. Geoffrey Newton and his managing clerk, Mr. William Grant, called at the nearest police-station an hour later and gave information to the effect that a dismissed clerk, Stephen Moore, had demanded an interview with them. They had agreed to it in the hope that he might be able to offer some proofs or suggestions in extenuation of the charge which to their minds was already only too clearly proved, *i.e.*, that of robbing his friend Mortimer of £300, and concocting a preposterous story to account for his movements at the time when he was engaged in putting the money in a safe place. They had heard him with patience and even kindness, but, to their consternation, Moore, who had been suffering from intense excitement all through the interview, suddenly rose to his feet, and, tearing wildly at his collar and necktie, fell dead in, they presumed, an apoplectic fit.

The police found on inquiry everything in the statement of Newton and Grant to be perfectly accurate. Moore's landlady, the engineer Mortimer (who was an unwilling witness), the shabby waiter, the cabman, even Miss Van Alstyne (who was summoned reluctantly), formed when taken together

a respectable company of witnesses against the integrity of the dead man.

The verdict at the final inquiry would unquestionably have been "death from natural causes," but for the evidence of the gentleman whom the Government employed at the last moment. His evidence was very material, and changed the whole aspect of the case, as well as the trend of public opinion on it. He was an authority.

He had no doubt that the deceased had not died from apoplexy, but that he was poisoned by nicotine, the poisonous alkaloid of tobacco which kills as quickly as apoplexy. The appearance of the victim of this poison after death—the prominent staring eyes and fulness about the neck, and so on—would resemble an apoplectic case so far that a physician with a biassed mind—a man, that is, who had been informed that apoplexy was the cause of death, and who had no special reason for doubting it—might readily arrive at that result. The fact that nicotine is not in the British Pharmacopœia, or in any, indeed, save the Swedish, did not seem to him likely to create a difficulty in procuring a fatal dose. It is known to the faculty, and described in unofficial text-books.

And it would be easily administered, as it is miscible in water, ether, and alcohol, as well as the fixed oils.

The witness admitted that some of the symptoms he had noticed in this instance were not usual in cases of poisoning by true nicotine, but he had recently had charge of cases in which the active poisonous agent was still more successfully disguised. In his experience the modern poisoner always aimed at the simulation of disease and the destruction of all traces of poison in the body of the victim. Distorted science, so to speak, had for the moment secured a slight lead on true science, which would be set aside in the near future. He himself had a work in the Press which would present his views on this extraordinary by-path of criminality much more comprehensively than anything he could say on the spur of the moment in his evidence. After a long elaboration of his diagnosis of the case, including a suggestion as to the impossibility of the self-infliction of some marks of violence he had found upon the body the witness closed his evidence, and was complimented by the Court.

Newton and Grant were at once arrested, and

the latter turned Queen's evidence. He admitted having drugged his fellow-clerk when in the café, and taken the bag of gold in order to ruin him and get him 'out of the way. He feared Moore knew too much of the affairs of Newton, Langley, and Brown, and he wished to be the only legatee of Newton's malpractices. He had the decency left to keep back Miss Van Alstyne's name. Newton and he had vainly endeavoured to "square" Moore at a reasonable figure, and, having failed, they killed him. He gave the details, but they are not intrinsically interesting.

Newton suffered the extreme penalty of the law. Smart Lane was rid of its smartest "operator," and the way to other people's money was thus made easier for operators of less nerve, resource, and general rascality.

IX.—DR. MOWBRAY'S PATIENT.

SURGEON-COLONEL HEDFORD'S Indian servant, Chundra-Dass, looked at his master's breakfast table one morning when he came to clear away and began to make remarks in Hindustani, which he always spoke when strongly moved. The Colonel's meal had been a light one, as all his meals had been for some time. Plain living and high thinking is admirable, but if carried too far one begins to think stupidly, and one soon ceases to live. Hence the remarks of Chundra-Dass. Translated freely they would read as follows :

"If the Colonel-Sahib will permit the liberty I would say he works too much and eats too little. He must eat more and think less. Then he will be strong, and the heart of Chundra-Dass will rejoice exceedingly."

"He's not far wrong," Hedford said to himself as he pushed back his chair and looked at the un-

touched dishes on the table, "I have been working too hard and I am really feeling seedy." To Chundra-Dass :

"Get my things packed early to-morrow. I shall run down to Merton-on-Sea for a week."

Chundra-Dass salaamed, and left the room. The truth was, Hedford had been working night and day trying to discover the bacillus which Viancani, the Hermit of Letterfrack, had used in conjunction with the virus of hydrophobia, and at last he had succeeded. Twice he had been interrupted in his pursuit of the unknown bacillus by professional duties, but since his last case he had devoted himself unremittingly to the work. Curiously enough, his researches brought him over much of the ground traversed by the German Koch ; and on this plane he thought he had made a great discovery ; but he determined to keep it to himself until he was quite sure whether it was a great discovery or a gigantic mistake.

The Specialist's naturally spare frame was now thinner than ever. His face was grey and old. The spirit had outrun the flesh ; so the flesh should have a chance to catch up. He would take a well-earned rest. His dinner was a failure hardly less

pronounced than his breakfast, though Chundra-Dass had provided many of those burning delicacies indigenous to India's coral strands. An extra glass of wine had little beneficial effect.

After dinner Hedford went to his study, and seating himself in his favourite arm-chair lit a cigar. He looked regretfully round the comfortable room ; at his favourite books, his delightful experiments lying half-finished everywhere. All this must be exchanged for the discomfort of a third-rate sea-side hotel. The man was depressed and tired out. Presently he fell asleep, and awoke in a couple of hours vastly refreshed. Looking at his watch he saw that it was nearly midnight. His brain was now in a strangely exalted condition. His perceptive faculties were abnormally keen. He reviewed mentally his recent labours, and wondered how he had taken so long to arrive at results which now seemed so clear. A steamer chair was opposite to him. He had brought it home on his last voyage. This last voyage, in turn, suggested his last visit to India, his *Studies in Indian Toxicology*, and the old native officer, Rissaldu Ali Khan, from whom he had received many a hint.

"I can almost fancy I see his face there upon

that chair," Hedford said aloud. And then a strange thing happened. Ali Khan's rather pleasant-looking dark face, which the Colonel had conjured up in imagination, took palpable form; it became gradually paler and less pleasant-looking. The nose grew larger; the eyes changed colour, from dark brown to greenish-grey. The turban disappeared. Rusty iron-grey hair and square-cut whiskers appeared. Thin, bloodless lips—the transformation was complete.

Colonel Hedford lit a fresh cigar and smoked it with deliberation, lazily watching the head, and smiling at the trick his fancy had played him. But a weird sensation began to oppress him—he felt that there was really some personality other than his own in the room. The head was now very clearly defined. Moreover, the eyes in it were watching Hedford carefully. He put out his right hand and lifted a book: the eyes followed the motion. He extended his left hand and picked up a match-box: the eyes followed his left hand. Their expression betrayed great fear.

"This comes of over-work," Hedford muttered, feeling his own pulse. It was nearly normal, only a trifle fast. "Bromide of soda is perhaps the best

thing in my state. I shall take twenty grains." He measured the dose carefully, and drank off the medicine. Then he rang for Chundra-Dass.

Chundra-Dass answered the bell at once. He had been alarmed by his master's appearance, and was waiting up.

"I shall now try an experiment," Hedford said coolly. "Bromide of soda *versus* ghost. I back the bromide." To Chundra-Dass he said shortly, "Sit down there, in that chair."

Chundra-Dass hesitated. To sit down in the presence of the Colonel-Sahib, and in his own special room! But the order had been given, so it must be obeyed. When the Hindoo sat down the head moved up and now appeared to rest on the back of the chair. It remained there for a short time and then faded slowly away.

"The bromide wins—ghost nowhere," Hedford said, gaily dismissing Chundra-Dass. The ghost was laid; but what of sleep? Well, the resources of civilisation were not yet exhausted. Thirty grains of sulphonal solved that difficulty. But before he dropped off, Hedford re-confirmed his resolution that for a time at least he would cease from troubling the bacilli, and that so far as

he was concerned the weariest microbe should have rest.

A few days at Merton-on-Sea worked wonders with Colonel Hedford. He was much better. The old healthy tan was coming back to his cheek; his nervous prostration had disappeared. He was a new man, or his old self. One bright morning he noticed an unusual number of visitors dotted over the strip of firm, yellow sand he had already found, from experience and the local guide-book, to be one of the principal attractions of the place. Merton-on-Sea had not yet evolved into the piano-organ and nigger minstrel stage, but it was within measurable distance of it. To avoid the crowd Surgeon-Colonel Hedford strolled to the headland which juts out into the German Ocean and shelters the place from the north winds. He found a comfortable seat on the path half-way up the cliff, and sat down well pleased with himself and humanity—so long as humanity kept to the sand and left him the cliff.

Overhead, the blue sky was white-flecked, with hurrying clouds. Beneath, the great ocean was muttering in its drowsy heave. Two fishing boats, their heads laid well to windward of the foreland,

were evidently trying to weather the point. The sunlight falling on their dingy sails turned them into a creamy white. Seagulls floated by on poised pinions.

Hedford's day-dream was interrupted by the sound of voices on the cliff above him. A lad and a lass came down the steep path. The girl was extremely handsome. She could not have been more than eighteen years, and from the joyous but at the same time intellectual expression of her face she was in the pink of physical and mental health. Her companion, a sun-browned lad some few years older in appearance, had "gentleman"—in its true rather than its conventional sense—in every line of his face. They seemed well satisfied with each other.

"Dear me! these seaside places; nothing but love-making; makes a man of my time of life feel quite an old fogey. I wish these young people would keep their surplus happiness more to themselves. Bah!"

But, notwithstanding this misanthropical reflection, Hedford could not help watching amongst the sand hills below for a glimpse of the scarlet Tam-o'-Shanter, and he began to think—but it

matters not what he thought just then, for immediately he thought of something altogether different. The same odd sensation he had felt for the first time in his life ten days ago in his study in Salchester—that of some person or personality near him for whom or which he could not account rationally—oppressed him.

“This will not do,” he said sharply, “I shall have the manless head here—a change at all events from the headless man of our childish memories.” The prophesy was soon fulfilled.

Here was the head, but not manless! It had a body attached to it, and the man was walking towards him. The head had the same iron-grey hair, the white square-cut whiskers and the large nose; also the same bloodless lips and the same eyes. The eyes, however, were different from the eyes in the “dream” head. They were grave and thoughtful. Their expression suggested introspection, not watchfulness nor cunning. The man did not see Hedford until he was close to him. Then he came to a full stop and dropped his walking-stick.

“I trust, sir, you are not ill,” Hedford said anxiously, for the man’s embarrassment was greater than could be accounted for by a chance meeting with a supposed acquaintance.

"Thank you, no, sir, nothing but a passing spasm from which I suffer. Heart, you know. I take you for a medical man. Think we've met before. Seem to know your face."

"I seem to know your head," Colonel Hedford assented.

The passing spasm must have returned suddenly, for the stranger nearly fell off his feet and was obliged to accept Colonel Hedford's assistance to the seat. Little conversation passed, and in a few minutes the man arose, professed himself restored, and took his leave with courteous gratitude. When he was gone Hedford said to himself :

"This is really very odd. My nerves must be gone to the deuce. That was certainly the head I saw. If I had not taken the precaution to bring Chundra-Dass into the room I should certainly think I had only been dreaming. Looks as if I would end a theosophist. Ozone and exercise, however, will soon pull me together."

A few days afterwards the Specialist was again on the scat on the cliff. The scene was changed since his last visit. All the vivid colouring was gone ; the crested waves, the snowy surf, the brilliant sunshine. The sky was a dull grey and the sea

like lead. No well-dressed promenaders appeared on the sands. A chill damp wind blew inwards from the sea. Hedford did not mind it, for he was well wrapped up. But the dreary prospect could not be ignored. It depressed him greatly. One item in his catalogue of mental discomforts remained. It was supplied by the young couple whom he had seen and admired on his first visit to the cliff.

It was the same couple who came along—the same but with a difference. For just as all the warmth and colour had passed out of the prospect, so had the life and the laughter passed from the young faces. As they passed by, the girl coughed, a dry, hacking cough.

“That means consumption,” Hedford reflected. “But let me see: this is only Saturday. On Monday last she appeared in perfect health, and now—it is impossible. Still, I know the first stage of a churchyard cough when I hear it. Hallo! Here’s the head!”

“Good day, sir! An unpleasant change in the weather since we last met here,” Hedford said politely.

“Good day!” the man answered, rather absently.

He was watching the young couple. The lad was taking off his Inverness to wrap the lass against the chill breeze. She protested, apparently, but he would not be denied. It was a very simple thing to do, but there was a solicitude, and even tenderness, in his action which could be discerned at a distance. The cloak was much too long for the girl. She tried to laugh at her appearance in it, the laugh ended in the dry cough.

"Handsome pair!" Hedford remarked, to open the conversation. "Pity of them!"

"Pity of them? Don't see it," the stranger replied, in a surly voice.

"It is surely a pity of the girl. Quite well on Monday; consumptive cough on Saturday. It is an extraordinary case. What's more, it is not in the *Pharmacopœia*, so to speak."

"Then it should interest you, Surgeon-Colonel Hedford. You ought to put it there."

"You know my name?"

"I have read it in the papers."

"And you think I ought to take up this case—that there is a case to take up."

"You could not do better than make a case of it." This was said with a sneer that nettled

Hedford. He said quietly, but emphatically, as though replying to a challenge :

"Then I will make a case of it, and do it as well as I can, Mr.——"

"Dr. Mowbray."

"Thanks ; I did not know your name, though your face is familiar to me."

"This is the second time you have made that statement. Where have you seen my face? "

"In my study ; panelled room ; black oak ; brass clock and ornaments on mantelpiece ; buffalo head between windows—I see you recognise the room."

Dr. Mowbray got up from the seat and said coldly :

"The description of your study is interesting, but I remember an appointment."

"And you remember my study, however you came to see it," Colonel Hedford added mentally.

"Miss Evans, sir, is on a visit to her rich aunt, Mrs. Musgrave, who lives on the esplanade. The gentleman is the old lady's son. He used to come here pretty often to play billiards, but we haven't

seen much of him since the young lady came. Thank you, sir, much obliged."

Ten minutes after the hall porter of the Pavilion Hotel had given Colonel Hedford this information, Jack Musgrave walked into the billiard-room. Hedford, who had seen him enter the hotel, followed him into the comfortable room. Owing to the rawness of the day, outdoor occupations were at a discount and the tables were all occupied.

"Not much chance of getting a game for some time," Hedford remarked to Musgrave by way of introduction.

"No! Miserable day; everyone inside. Do you play?"

"Only a little. Did you walk far round the cliffs this morning? I saw you pass."

Jack Musgrave looked up in surprise. It was rather soon to have his movements discussed by a chance acquaintance. But the Colonel put his hand upon the lad's shoulder, and said, with real kindness in his voice:

"Don't be offended. Perhaps I have an object in my question—a friendly object."

Musgrave's trusting nature was easily captured by so experienced a student of human nature. In

a few moments he was pouring all his woes into the ear of this sympathetic stranger, and when he had finished Hedford said directly :

"Will you introduce me to your cousin? I am interested in her case. I am a medical man. This is my card."

"Colonel Hedford, the famous——?"

"Notorious, would be a better word," Hedford put in, smiling. "Now you will understand that I am not actuated by idle curiosity, if I ask you a few questions about your cousin. In the first place, how long has she been ill?"

"About twelve months."

"Permanently ill, or in an intermittent way as at present?"

"Intermittent; 'one week well the next ill. Now, on last Monday, she——"

"Looked in splendid health. I saw her."

"Well the next day she was wretched, and has been so ever since."

"Your medical adviser is?"

"Dr. Mowbray."

"Who!" Hedford could not restrain the exclamation. But he instantly recovered, and went on as calmly as if he had expected the name.

"Does Dr. Mowbray practice here?"

"Oh, no. He is from London. He only runs down here to see his patient."

"Often?"

"Too often for my wishes. Though I can't deny that he has acted well, considering everything."

"Considering what?"

"Well, our engagement, for one thing. You must know that Dr. Mowbray proposed to Miss Evans half a dozen times, but she never could bear him. Then, when we were engaged, he behaved really handsomely. Withdrew all opposition—he has got some hold over my mother which I never could discover—and wrote such a decent letter; wishing every happiness and so on. Besides, when Nell took ill and all the doctors in London, or a good many of them, from Sir Joshua Wren down, gave her up, Mowbray pulled her through. All the same she can't endure the sight of him."

"When did she first take ill?"

"Shortly after we were engaged."

"I presume that is all you can tell me?"

"There is only one thing more," Musgrave said, looking very miserable. "Mowbray says that he

can no longer spare the time to look after Nell, and proposes that for her sake I should now give her up to him. Ah! Colonel Hedford," the boy broke out impetuously ; " you are absorbed in your profession, and your studies, and your hobbies. You do not know what it is to suffer as I do. You do not know what human misery is."

" Pardon me, my young friend. I am, roughly speaking, about twice your age. Therefore I know at least twice as much about it as you do."

" I don't know what to do," Musgrave said more quietly ; " it seems a sort of wilful murder on my part if I refused to give her up."

" Nothing of the sort," Hedford said decisively. " Refuse at once and stand by your refusal, and I will stand by you."

When Surgeon-Colonel Hedford was introduced to Miss Evans he found her very ill indeed. Her lassitude was so prostrating that she was hardly able to shake it off even momentarily to speak civilly to the distinguished stranger who had called for the express purpose of being of service to her. But then so many distinguished persons had visited her with the same benevolent intention and had gone away without any good result—save to them-

selves in the form of a handsome fee—that she was growing sceptical. Still there was something about this Specialist which differentiated him from the others. For one thing he wanted no fee. For another he had what the Irish call “a way with him” that sooner or later won over the most obstinate patient. In a little time he had won over Miss Evans and received her fullest confidence. Amongst a good deal of immaterial and slightly irrelevant matter which she brought under his notice, one fact impressed him strongly. She was afraid of Dr. Mowbray.

“You seem to be—as it were—rather afraid of your doctor,” Hedford said guardedly. The girl started, stammered, and stopped blankly. Then she said slowly, as if analysing her own inmost feelings while she spoke :

“Yes, I think I am, as you say, afraid of Dr. Mowbray.”

“You can give no reason for this strange emotion?”

“No, none whatever. He has been most kind, but still I am afraid of him. I can’t help it. I can’t explain it. You will think me mad——”

“Not at all; never mind what I think. I never

think until I have diagnosed. And let me tell you, my dear young lady, I have diagnosed more intricate diseases than pneumonia—or even phthisis.”

“What have I got?” There was a hysterical entreaty in the question which could not be mistaken. The girl was in great fear.

“That is just what I do not know. But” (hastily, for with a despairing gesture she had turned away) “I mean to find out.”

Hedford secured the last half-finished bottle of medicine which Dr. Mowbray had made up for Miss Evans, and was about to wish the girl good night in order to hurry to his hotel for the purpose of a hasty and, under the circumstances, perfunctory analysis. He was already intensely interested in his case. Habit is a hard master.

Miss Evans rose as quickly as her strength permitted from the couch on which she was lying, and stood up with a scarlet blotch on either cheek. Seizing Hedford's hands she cried hysterically:

“You will save me, I cannot bear to die and leave them—leave Jack. You will not tell them I said this. I have hidden what I feel from them lest it might add to their pain. Ah! I who could never bear to be alone in the dark—to be alone in

the grave! It is too terrible. I am afraid to die!"

She sank back on the couch overcome.

"My poor child," Hedford said soothingly, "you must not agitate yourself in this way. Trust me to do my best. I cannot promise anything now, but you will trust me to try?"

"Yes, I will trust you. Only do not be long or you will be too late."

"I think I shall be in time. I have a theory, and my theories have a convenient knack of developing into facts. Good night! Keep up your heart."

Nell slept well that night. The Specialist's cheery words were better for her than Dr. Mowbray's tonic. In the morning she was noticeably better. She could not help humming little snatches of song as she dressed.

Surgeon-Colonel Hedford would have had a warm welcome that morning if he had called at the house on the esplanade. But he was then on his way to London. Dr. Mowbray was in the same train. They travelled in different carriages. But each knew that the other was a fellow-passenger. Hedford knew also that their errands to town were

identical, owing to the heavy hand wherewith Dr. Mowbray wrote out his telegram. The tracing was distinctly legible on the next form, which happened to be used by the toxicologist.

The latter reached their common destination first. It cost him a couple of guineas in addition to a preposterous price for a broken-kneed cab-horse which contrived, with his driver's assistance, to fall at a slippery crossing, and thereby delay the fare—Dr. Mowbray. It was the fortune of war—which is directed mainly by the freest purse.

When Hedford's interview with the great London Brain Specialist—on whom he had called prior to Dr. Mowbray—was in progress, he interrupted more urgent business by asking abruptly:

"How do you account for that vision of mine? It must have some scientific or psychological explanation, and I confess it beats me. You must remember I recognised the man, and he recognised me the moment we met."

"The explanation is surely very simple," the Specialist answered.

"I'm glad you think so," Hedford put in.

"Nothing simpler. You were both pursuing the same line of investigation. He naturally heard of

you, saw your photograph reproduced in the papers. You must have seen his and have forgotten that you had. Look at this." It was a cabinet photograph of Dr. Mowbray, and Hedford remembered at once the occasion when he had seen it.

"Yes, I now remember when and where I saw that. If we could only prove that Mowbray dreamed his head was in my study at the time I fancied I saw it there, it would be an excellent case for the Psychical Research Society. He certainly looked amazed when I emphasised the fact that I knew his *head*. But what are we to do about this girl? In order to compel her to marry him, I believe he is killing her by inches, and he may succeed outright before I am ready with proofs—if I can ever get absolute proofs—on which to found a charge against him."

"That will not be necessary."

"I am glad you think so."

"Oh, I know it."

"Perhaps you would relieve me by telling me how you know it."

"I will. Did it not strike you as odd that Mowbray should pointedly challenge you, of all men, to take up this case. You told me he did so in effect."

"Yes, I admit that."

"Well, suppose I tell you that he confided to me—telling the story, of course, as though it applied to a friend of his—the whole details about this girl and his own treatment of her. And that he asked my advice as to how to treat his hypothetical patient—to wit, himself—who was then past, he said, rational action. And——"

"Go on!"

"And that I recommended him to place the case in your hands in the hope, as I put it, of frightening his mad friend out of his evil practice, which, of course, he declined to do."

"But which he practically did."

"Ah! that was the uncontrollable impulse of the moment—the tendency to do the worst thing possible, which is not unusual in his present cerebral condition. Now you tell me he knew you were coming to me——"

"I took good care he should know it the moment I found that he himself was coming here."

"And your diagnosis bears out what I say, that his hypothetical friend was in reality himself?"

"I can't quite call my surmise a diagnosis. But from the whole circumstances of the case, the

medicine and the respirator which the girl gave me, smelling as it does of a mild antiseptic which would be innocuous to the almost impalpable tubercle bacillus, all lead me to the conclusion that he was working something on Koch's method. Of course, there is the important difference that Mowbray knowingly administered as a toxin what Koch erroneously used as an anti-toxin. He infected the girl from time to time with a modified form of consumption, and cured her, or rather allowed Nature to counteract him, as suited his purpose. That is my surmise."

"I quite agree with your surmise as you prefer to call it; and now that Mowbray knows you are on his track, and have come to consult me, I should not be surprised at anything he may do."

"Telegram, sir," a man-servant said, entering the consulting room after knocking. It was from the house physician of a famous hospital:

"Dr. Mowbray just expired. Picrotoxine."

Mr. and Mrs. Musgrave possess a large and handsomely-framed portrait of Surgeon-Colonel Hedford. It occupies a place of honour in their reception-room, and the attention of the most casual visitor is drawn to it.

X.—THE DEATH ADDER.

HEDFORD was much benefited by the breezes of Melton-on-Sea, notwithstanding his little spell of professional work during his stay there. He returned to Salchester in better health and with more vital energy than he had possessed since he first accepted the novel rôle of scientific detective which had been partly thrust upon him. His reserve of nervous force had been strongly supplemented by the comparatively quiet interval, and he was once more fit for anything that required a cool and normal brain and a steady mental balance. These were exactly the factors that were most necessary in the duty which awaited him on his return. This duty announced itself the morning after his arrival. It stared him in the face from the agony column of the *Times*.

“Wanted, the heirs or relatives of John Archdale, late of the Indian Civil Service. Apply to F. A. Turner, Solicitor, 12 Duncairn Street, Salchester.”

The advertisement was sufficiently vague. It might mean a great deal or nothing at all. It was, however, a coincidence that Hedford had met the late John Archdale when in India, and knew a little about him. That knowledge did not amount to much ; to little more than that Archdale was a good administrator and an educated naturalist. Also that he had by careful economy—and a certain method that officials sometimes acquire in remote stations of adding to their incomes without causing scandal—amassed a considerable fortune. If the advertisement had caught the eye of the Specialist a fortnight earlier he might not have given it a second thought. Under his altered condition of health he opened his writing desk on the spot and wrote a hasty note to the solicitor, whom he knew, explaining his acquaintance with the dead man, and offering his services gratuitously. He might as well keep his hand in. Mr. Turner replied by return post, asking for an interview at his earliest convenience.

Surgeon-Colonel Hedford arrived punctually, as was usual with him, at 12, Duncairn Street. He was cordially received by the solicitor, a tall, keen-eyed, prominent-nosed, close-shaven man, of a

countenance genial rather than legal, and with the presence and bearing which suggests the contented mind that is a continual feast. Turner's hair was white, but, like that of the prisoner of Chillon, it had not grown so in a single night as men's have done from sudden fears. It went that way by easy stages, and the face below the snowy skull-cap was still young—the sort of face that grows old slowly.

"Sit down, Colonel Hedford," the solicitor said affably. "I am very glad to see you. You are the very man I want in the difficult case that has just been entrusted to me——"

"Difficult!" Hedford interposed. "I have been accustomed latterly to cases of difficulty. But, if you will excuse me, I cannot see any element of difficulty in this. The man died. You want to find his heirs?"

"That is not all," Turner said in a somewhat melodramatic voice. "I want to know how he died as well. It might mean as much to me as the finding of the heirs."

"'Natural causes,' according to the verdict. I see from this report that the death was sudden. There was an inquest."

"Oh, yes! There was an inquest and that was the verdict. But we don't rely much on it. Coroner's juries have been somewhat discredited latterly——"

"Impossible!" Hedford interrupted.

"I accept the correction," Turner said good-humouredly. "It would no doubt be impossible to discredit an average coroner or his jury, considering that they forestall the public in that direction. But to waive the point, do you recognise this photograph?"

"I do," Hedford answered readily. "It is the photograph of Henry Morewood, Archdale's secretary. Do you know him?"

"Yes."

"What do you think of him?"

"I think," the solicitor said with asperity, "that he has the manners of a cad, and the countenance of a cut-throat."

"I must differ with you again," Hedford replied in a quiet voice. "I think you're rather hard—upon the cut-throat!"

Turner laughed unaffectedly. The joke emphasised his own point of view. A joke must be unconscionably dull when it fails to amuse a man

under those circumstances. It was, however, with a very serious air that the solicitor leant forward in his chair, and placing his hand on Hedford's knee said in a whisper: "Have you any idea what Archdale died worth?"

"None whatever."

"Well, he died worth £40,000, and if his heirs, exors., admors., &c.—you know the rhyme—cannot be discovered this money goes to Morewood. Archdale was so long abroad that we can find neither kith nor kin."

"By the way," Hedford asked, "why do you want to find these heirs-at-law? I mean, what is your share in the matter? Who has retained you?"

"Archdale!"

"The dead man?"

"Yes; read that!"

It was a letter from Archdale to Turner. It mentioned the writer's infirm health, his expectation of an early death, his disposition of his property, viz.:—Morewood to inherit if a blood relation could not be discovered within twelve months of the writer's death—and it concluded with an extraordinarily urgent petition for zealous search. It

seemed as if the testator had made his will under compulsion, and was anxious at the last moment to stultify its provisions. Hedford compared the date of the letter with that of the journal containing the account of the inquest, and said to the solicitor :

“ Archdale must have died very soon after writing to you? ”

“ He died within an hour.”

“ And Morewood! what has he done? Any-thing suspicious? ”

“ Quite the contrary. He found the body, informed the police, gave excellent evidence, and was complimented by the Coroner.”

Hedford at this point in the conversation arose, walked leisurely and somewhat noisily to the door of the private room and looked out. He saw nothing suspicious, and did not shut the door carefully. This was unusual with him, for in important consultations he always closed the door or doors of the room with as much caution as if he expected to be besieged. He let this one slam too carelessly. He had not, therefore, quite recovered his professional exactness—or his mind may have been otherwise engaged.

A long consultation followed, and when it was

over Turner placed a carefully-drawn statement of the circumstances connected with Archdale's death in Colonel Hedford's hands. The Specialist left with a promise to communicate his opinion thereon at the earliest moment. He walked along the street at a quick pace until he found a cab. Hailing this he drove straight home, and on his arrival there retired to the room which was his study, laboratory, and detective-office all in one, and at once commenced the perusal of Turner's brief. He had barely got through the introduction to this weighty document when Chundra-Dass knocked at the door and entered the room.

"Stranger, sahib——"

"Not at home!"

"Sahib says you will see him when you know that his name is——"

"Henry Morewood," said a voice at the door. The man must have followed the servant from the hall.

The action in itself was impertinent, and there was in addition an ugly leer of familiarity on Morewood's repulsive face, and an insolent ring in his voice, which could hardly be agreeable to the master of any house into which they

were intruded. The master of this particular house was not accustomed to suffer insolence at home or elsewhere. He arose and faced his visitor, saying sharply :

"I regret I am engaged." To Chundra-Dass :
"See this gentleman out."

"Not yet, please," Morewood said coolly, to the servant. "I must have a talk with your master first. I wish to speak to you, sir, about the affairs of the late John Archdale, which I understand are interesting you at present."

This was rather embarrassing, but Hedford kept his countenance. He did not move a muscle as he answered : "You make a slight dialectical error. The affairs of the late John Archdale are not interesting me—they are occupying me. You are welcome to the admission."

"The more especially, I presume, as I was already acquainted with its tenor." The man sat down uninvited, drew a cigar from his case—Hedford was smoking—lighted it, crossed his legs, and lay back in the chair. Hedford watched him sharply to judge, if possible, whether his coolness was real or mere bravado. It appeared to be altogether real. There seemed to be nothing sham

about it. There was nothing artificial either about his face. It was frankly brutal.

"Now about that brief of yours!" Morewood nodded toward the bundle of papers, which Hedford had thrown on a side table, and in spite of himself the veteran started. He did so visibly. Morewood noticed this, and paused to allow the point he had made to achieve its full effect. Meantime the "old hand" thought fast.

"About that brief of yours! Perhaps if you took me into your confidence you would get on faster with it."

"I do not intend to do so," Hedford answered quietly; "so we need not discuss the subject further. If, however, you have any information you wish to—dispose of—I might be able to treat with you. This, of course, is unlikely considering that the *status quo* is entirely in your favour." Morewood, he thought, was "bluffing," and in consequence it would be a fatal mistake to give way too easily, although any assistance that could be wrung out of him was desirable.

"You know a great deal about it," Morewood sneered.

"Pardon me," Hedford said imperturbably, "you

are again—dialectically—in error. I know little or nothing about it at present, but I shall know a good deal more about it before long—and about you.”

“I doubt that.”

“We shall see.”

“The reason I doubt is this,” Morewood said as he arose: “My knowledge of your own actions and purposes, which, as you may have observed, is considerable, is not gained through the usual back-stairs detective methods with which you, I understand, are familiar, but by the new super-scientific process of which you must have heard.”

“Very singular,” Hedford put in courteously. “Premising that I am of the opinion that there is *no* super-scientific process, may I ask what is the particular form of dementia to which you allude?”

“You mean, how I gained my knowledge of your motives as well as of your actions so far as they were influenced by me, or influenced me?”

“Precisely!”

“Telepathy!”

“This is most interesting,” Hedford said blandly, “for prior to your explanation I distinctly attributed

your knowledge and subsequent action to information received from a clerk of Turner's, who, I am aware, listened to the beginning of our consultation."

"Then you will find before you are through with this job that I have not been to the East for nothing, and that I happen to know a few things outside the philosophy of solicitor Turner himself, not to speak of his confidential clerk. Once for all, do you decline my assistance? It will not be offered again."

"I am afraid I am obliged to decline your assistance." This with studied courtesy.

"Might I ask—merely from idle curiosity—your reasons?"

"I would much prefer not to give them. They might give offence."

"Permit me to insist."

"Well, if you insist, I decline your help owing to your foolish pretence of super-scientific powers—in short, on the ground that I consider you an ignorant and insolent charlatan. Be careful about the steps. There are three. Chundra-Dass will light you down the main staircase."

Hedford rang an electric bell. His visitor

laughed an unpleasant and partly triumphant ha! ha! as he went down the stairs. The laugh had an evil ring in it. It was the laugh of a courageous rascal.

"So, I have a bold knave to deal with this time," the toxicologist said thoughtfully, as he selected a fresh cigar. "But there is always a way out of the wood which the boldest knave plants. And this is only a clumsy woodman. He has no eye for perspective. He forgets the most salient point of view."

This was all very well. But the problem Turner had stated was not much furthered by such optimistic reflections as the man who made them was inclined to admit when he had finished his brief.

Next morning Surgeon-Colonel Hedford proceeded with renewed vigour in the pursuit of his new mission. He had first an interview with ex-Detective Trowbrigg, whom he summoned by telegraph from town, and set to work. Then he called on Turner, to whom he only conveyed that he had seen the man, Morewood.

"And you got precious little out of him, I'll be bound," the burly solicitor said with emphasis.

"Not much, indeed, but I shall get more this evening. Where does he live?"

Turner rang a bell. His confidential clerk answered it.

"What is Mr. Henry Morewood's present address? You know it, don't you?"

The question was entirely candid. Turner noticed nothing, but Hedford observed that the confidential clerk paled slightly and stammered as he answered: "I can find out, sir."

"Find the deuce. I thought you were a friend of his."

Hedford looked out of the window. A couple of swallows were twittering and chattering together on an eave opposite, and resting after their long day's flight over green meadows and well-kept gardens, whence they swung upward, as the atmosphere changed, for great stretches through the azure sky. To a man of any science all science is interesting. All branches cannot, of course, be pursued simultaneously with profit; for each, be it the humblest, demands the concentration of the whole of the mortal span. Hedford was a physiologist. Ornithology, however, was interesting—for three-quarters of a minute. This short

period of time was sufficient for the confidential clerk to recover confidence. That was what Colonel Hedford wanted.

"No, sir—that is, not to any extent," the confidential clerk stammered.

"Oh, very well, it does not matter. You can go."

When the clerk had left the room the solicitor asked: "What shall we do now? We can easily get the address, but what are you going to do with it?"

"It depends entirely on how far you are interested. If you are only slightly interested I should advise the immediate withdrawal of your advertisements."

"The truth is—I am interested to the amount of a thousand pounds. That amount would not make or break the Bank of England, but it would be a substantial item in my year's income. I want it very badly. The offer was made by Archdale in a second letter which reached me simultaneously with the first. I would have shown it to you if I had thought it mattered."

"It does not really matter. I think if I were in your place I would—what do you call it?—set the law in motion."

"Bother the law, I am not likely to live a thousand years!" this very candid lawyer exclaimed.

"Then you wish to proceed, as it were, informally; that is, you wish me to act according to my own methods."

"Certainly!" The solicitor arose and shook the Specialist's hand warmly, saying: "What do you propose?"

"The first thing I propose," Hedford said quietly but directly, "is privately to exhume the body. You must be present at this, and if any prosecution should follow—for this Morewood is a plucky rascal—you must appear as sole defendant."

"God bless me, Colonel Hedford, that is a strange way of tracing Archdale's heirs."

"I do not propose to trace his heirs; that can only be done by your advertisements, or by other hands than mine."

"And may I ask whom do you hope to trace by exhuming the body?"

"I hope to trace its murderer; which may serve your purpose as well as the tracing of its heirs."

The solicitor reflected for some minutes, and then said in a hesitating voice: "You wish to be

clear of all risk, and you wish me to be the sole defendant?"

"By no means," Hedford interrupted, rising; "I have no wish whatever in the matter. I think you would be extremely ill-advised to take any risk, unless you think it might be worth your while."

"Can you guarantee——?"

"I guarantee nothing. This is our position. I am a Specialist in Poisons, more especially in Eastern poisons. I am inclined to think from the facts connected with the death of this man Archdale that he has been murdered by Morewood. As there were no wounds or marks of violence on the body I naturally suspect that the victim was poisoned. I also suspect that the poison was no ordinary one, or the symptoms could not possibly have escaped the doctor who was examined at the inquest; and, lastly, as Archdale and Morewood were well-known naturalists and botanists in India, I suspect that the agent used is, as I have said, unknown or only partially known in this country. I consider, however, that I have at least as much knowledge of Eastern poisons as either of these men could claim. If I had the body I would very soon inform you what it died of. That would be the first step."

"And the second?"

"Depends upon the result of the first. I must wish you good day. If you care to bring the body to your own house on Thursday night—say by eleven o'clock—I can undertake to get through in time for you to bury it again before daybreak, although the nights now are short. Send me a note before eight o'clock to-morrow, otherwise——"

"Otherwise?"

"I shall consider the matter at an end, and decline to take it up again."

Turner considered a minute and then said: "I think I see my way. Besides, I myself have a score to pay Morewood, and I would like to pay it liberally. I shall bring—it."

"Very good," Hedford replied. "I shall expect you and—it."

Several days had to elapse before the appointment would be due. Trowbrigg worked hard during the interval.

When the patient, and, to the lay mind, loathsome examination was over, Hedford laid down his knives and put away the antiseptics in readiness in case of accident, and locked up his numerous

tubes and other professional paraphernalia. Turner watched these preparations with a white face. Two bearers, as they might be called, snored peacefully on comfortable sofas which had been thoughtfully provided for the repose of their gin-sodden carcases. Trowbrigg was also there, as mysterious-looking as usual. The persons who have been indicated were the only occupants of the room in addition to the—the cut-up thing upon the table.

"What is it?" Turner asked hoarsely. "I would not go through this again for ten thousand, much less one. What was the poison?"

"That's just what bothers me at the moment," Hedford answered. "There is no trace of poison in the body."

"I thought not!"

The door had been opened unobserved. Henry Morewood stood by it, with the handle in his hand. His mocking laugh would have done violence to the artistic sense of an Adelphi villain. Hedford remembered it well.

"I thought not, Colonel Hedford, although you thought there would be. Another case of coincidence! No super-scientific process here!

Simply the information of an eavesdropping lawyer's clerk!"

"The eavesdropping clerk had evidently done his work as well as I could have wished," Hedford answered, without moving a muscle. Turner stared open-mouthed. The bearers fell sleepily off their sofas, struggled to their feet, sat down again and gaped. Trowbrigg never stirred. The clock ticked audibly. It sounded almost harshly. Morewood began again:

"The clerk had good ears to hear through a closed door."

"A partially closed door. I partially unclosed it."

"And Turner's servant mistook me just now for a Maharajah——"

"By my direction."

Morewood seized a chair and sat down heavily. He was in a highly nervous condition, and it escaped him that he had not mentioned to Hedford which Maharajah he had personated when he was so obligingly conducted to the operating-room. The man was really a charlatan, as Hedford had called him, but he partly believed in his own empiricism. Besides, he had a card in reserve that would serve him well even if this grey-moustached Specialist

actually possessed the telepathic power to which he himself had pretended so long that he had almost grown to believe in it. He recovered himself in a moment, and, rising from his chair, played his last card—his last but one, to be exact.

“You are still convinced that—man—was poisoned?”

“I am inclined to think so,” Hedford answered

“In spite of the fact that you have found no trace?”

Hedford bowed.

“I suppose you have a theory—as usual?”

“I have formed one.”

“If I tell you correctly what your theory is, will you be so good as not to ascribe it to the information of this gentleman’s confidential clerk.” He nodded towards Turner contemptuously.

“I will be so good.”

“Then your theory is—” (he was about to take a bold step, and he paused) “your theory is that Archdale died from the hypodermic injection of the dried venom of snake poison.”

“Of that of the death adder,” Hedford agreed

“I was about to say that.”

“I expected you would.”

"Thank you. For what reason?"

"Because you administered it yourself." To the "bearers": "Seize him! More of it will probably be found upon him."

The "bearers," willing for any riot, sprang upon Morewood, and pinned him against the wall.

"Bah! my good Colonel, tell your rascals to take their fingers from my throat—they are not light-fingered gentry by any means—and I will tell you something you little suspect."

"Unloose him, but see that he does not break out, or draw a weapon," Hedford commanded. The men obeyed. Morewood breathed more freely when their hands were off his throat.

"Archdale died from the effects of the dried venom of the death adder, as you have correctly diagnosed. But it was self-administered. Read that: I offered it to you before, but you would not treat with me."

He threw a paper to Hedford. It fell upon the *thing* that was upon the table. Morewood went white for a second, but instantly recovered his countenance.

Colonel Hedford picked up the paper, and read aloud:

"I am tired of life, and have decided to have done with it. At the same time, I do not wish that the stigma of an ancestral or relative suicide should rest on any of my people, if they can be found. I shall, therefore, inoculate myself with snake poison, which leaves no trace in the body, and so save them this so-called disgrace.

(Signed)

JOHN ARCHDALE"

"Ha! ha!" Morewood laughed. "So my very learned specialist and detective-toxicologist, etc., that is all, and it isn't very much!"

Trowbrigg had taken no part hitherto against Morewood, but he had faced round during this conversation, and was now watching him intently. The fiasco appeared to be over, and nothing apparently remained but to re-bury the dead and hush up the scandal, when the ex-detective sprang to his feet and burst out—

"No, it is not all. There is some more. Your name is not Henry Morewood, nor yet Thompson as I thought. I have been on the wrong track, Colonel Hedford, altogether wrong. This man's name is Sam Clark. He is wanted for the Ripple

Hill murder these ten years. I know him now. I will be responsible for his arrest."

"Wait," Hedford cried out. "There is something on the back of this paper. I see some faint tracings on the other side. Let's make them plainer." He splashed some chemical over the sheet, and the lines were soon faintly legible. He read aloud :

"Morewood has compelled me to do this, and also to make my will in his favour. The mysterious process by which he has contrived to achieve my complete mental subjugation I have not time to tell. I have written this in the only way in which it could pass his eye, and in the hope that someone will decipher it. Knowing that he was gradually gaining this terrible hold over me, I wrote to a solicitor named Turner——"

The writing ended there.

"Take hold of him!" Hedford shouted. Morewood waved them off. He had a hypodermic needle in his right hand. With this he pricked a vein in his left arm. Bowing to Hedford, he said with his diabolical and defiant laugh :

"The death adder!"

XI.—THE DANCE OF DEATH.

WILLIAM TUDOR FORBES, senior lieutenant in the 22nd Hussars, ran lightly up the staircase of the officers' quarters in the cavalry barracks at Torchester. Walking along the corridor, he came to Captain Aubrey Ffolliott's door, at which he stopped and knocked.

"Come in!"

Forbes walked into the room, and, taking a letter from his pocket, handed it to Ffolliott.

"Read that. It's from George Henry. What are you going to do in the matter?"

George Henry was the eldest son and heir of a local landed proprietor in the neighbourhood of Torchester. His father, who had succeeded to an estate impoverished by the excesses and extravagances of a long line of improvident ancestors, had made it the special business of his life to redeem the property from the mountain of mortgages which burdened it. By denying himself

all the luxuries and most of the comforts of civilised life, he had paid off many of the mortgages, and he hoped to leave the estate to his heir free of debt. In the meantime, George had only a very small allowance for one in his position, so small that he often regretted his father's persistence in his economic policy. He would have preferred a little more ready money in the present, and let the future take care of itself. This view, however, was carefully suppressed, for George was afraid of the old man. The letter which the senior subaltern handed to Ffolliott read as follows :

“ Langholme,

22nd May, 189—

DEAR FORBES,

I have got myself into a pretty mess. I ran up to town the other day on some lawyer's business for my father. Our mutual friend, Ffolliott, travelled by the same train. We went to see the 'New Barmaid,' and after supper adjourned to the 'Spitfire' club, which, as I suppose you know, is only another name for a select gambling shop. You know, old fellow, that cards are my besetting sin—you remember Oxford—well,

the long and the short of it is, that I owe Ffolliott a lot more than I can afford to pay at the present moment. What to do I don't know. If I make a clean breast of it to the governor it will get his back up. Do you think Ffolliott would wait for six months? I can let him have my life assurance policy as security. Then my year's allowance will come in handy. Will you sound him on the subject, and let me know the result.

Yours ever,

GEORGE HENRY.

"P.S.—I'll never touch a card as long as I live.—G. H."

"Well, what are you going to do?" Forbes inquired when Ffolliott had read the letter.

"Do? Henry must pay up, of course. A man should not play unless he is prepared to pay."

"How much does he owe you?"

"Only five hundred pounds: a mere trifle to a man with Henry's prospects."

"But, stop a bit, Ffolliott, George is a great friend of mine—an old school chum—and I know his circumstances. His father keeps him awfully close. The money is good enough, and why not

give him time. It will ruin him if his father gets hold of this card business."

But it did not suit Captain Ffolliott to wait. As a matter of fact he himself wanted the money badly. It would just stop a hole. His own creditors were pressing; more than pressing, they were clamorous.

"Look here, Forbes, a debt of honour is a debt of honour, and must be paid. I am afraid I can hold out no hope of giving your friend an indefinite period of time to discharge his liability. He can apply to the Jews. He can raise money on a post-obit easily enough."

Which being interpreted signified that George Henry might go to the Jews—or the devil—for the consideration which it was plain he need not expect from his friend. Perhaps it served him right. The way of the gambler is hard.

Lieutenant Forbes lost his temper, about the worst thing a man can lose when in a position of difficulty—either for himself or his friend.

"I am sorry I showed you the letter," he said coldly. "I might have known better. And I may as well tell you straight that I think it a very fishy transaction on your part to take a mere boy into a gambling club, induce him to play for high stakes,

and then leave him in the lurch, or rather chuck him bodily into the lurch."

"Your opinion is a matter of perfect indifference to me," Ffolliott said with equal coldness. His voice, indeed, was studiously calm; but his eyes were ugly.

"I wonder what the regiment would think?" Forbes continued. "You are nearly twice Henry's age. You will be held responsible if the boy gets into trouble."

This was the crucial point. Ffolliott was near the age limit. His majority, however, was almost due, and if he could get through the present financial crisis in his career all would be well. If he could not he would be obliged to retire—without much credit. Once or twice, if not oftener, there comes a time in every man's life when he must fight for his own hand irrespective of the personality of his opponent. Such a time had come to Ffolliott. He must have young Henry's money or surrender his own life—that is, his reputation. He decided without difficulty to surrender George Henry's.

Captain Ffolliott arose from his chair and, speaking in an ex-cathedra voice, said:

"You are impertinent, Mr. Forbes; I take no insolence from you or any man in the regiment, or out of it. Let your friend come here and arrange his own affairs. I do not require and shall not permit your interference. You understand me?"

"Perfectly," Forbes answered. "Later on you will understand me." With which ambiguous remark he banged the door, and strode off down the corridor to his own room, there to write a hurried note to George Henry. This was shortly afterwards despatched to that unhappy youth by a mounted orderly. It was neither grateful nor comforting to the recipient.

Two days afterwards Captain Ffolliott walked down to the County Club, where he met Henry by appointment. They adjourned to a lawyer's office, and Henry assigned absolutely his life-policy for £2,000 to his creditor as security for the debt of £500; the policy to be reassigned on payment of the debt.

Surgeon-Colonel Hedford was chatting with an old army friend (Colonel Thomson, commanding 22nd Hussars) in the smoking-room of the United Service Club. The conversation was interrupted

by an attendant, who informed the Specialist that he was wanted at the telephone.

"Well, good-bye, Thomson," he said, shaking hands with his friend. "I shall hardly see you again for some time; you go back to Torchester to-night, don't you?"

"Yes; I am sorry to say I do. Could have done with another week in town very well. But my second in command goes on leave to-morrow, so I must get back. You won't forget the regimental ball, Hedford?"

"Balls are not very much in my line," Hedford replied with a smile. "I'd much rather you would let me off."

"Oh, you must turn up," Colonel Thomson said. "You will meet quite a number of old Indian cronies. Torchester's full of them. You will come? That's right! Good-bye, Hedford. So glad to have met you again."

Hedford went to the telephone, and found he was particularly wanted at the office of the Royal Standard Life Assurance Company by Mr. Montagu Scott, the manager.

"Another mystery, I suppose," the famous toxicologist muttered, as the cab in which he was

seated bowled rapidly along Piccadilly. "I am getting sick of this business. I feel half-inclined to give it up. What's more, I feel wholly inclined. I will give it up—after this case."

But when the manager of the "Royal Standard" had explained the latest "case" to him, he forgot his weariness, and was as anxious as ever to solve the mystery.

"What aroused your suspicions?" the Specialist inquired after he had listened to a brief precis of the salient facts on which he had been invited to give his opinion. "For my part I can see nothing wrong."

"And there may be nothing wrong," Mr. Montagu Scott replied. "But the fact remains that the deceased, George Henry, only transferred his policy to Captain Ffolliott two months ago. The interment will not take place until Thursday. What we want you to do is to go down to Langholme, and make an examination of the body in company with Dr. McCullagh, who is our medical officer in Torchester."

The result of the consultation, which lasted long and was very earnest, was that Hedford went down to Torchester, looked up Dr. McCullagh, and in

his company paid a visit to the chamber of death.

"Apoplexy, I think you said?" Hedford inquired.

"Yes. There can be no doubt about it whatever," Dr. McCullagh answered. "He was quite unconscious when I was called in to see him, and never rallied. Surgeon-Major Brown, who was present at the tennis-match, had the poor fellow carried into the tent before I arrived. Everything was done for him that could be done."

The old doctor sighed rather unprofessionally as he removed the covering from the face of the dead.

There was nothing in the appearance of the body to suggest that death had taken place from any other cause than apoplexy. The usual symptoms were present. Hedford made a careful examination, but discovered nothing suspicious. The relatives would never consent to a post-mortem, and it would even savour of cruelty to suggest it. As the Specialist was about to replace the covering, his practised eye detected a slight discoloration on the sole of the left foot.

"What is that?" he said, stooping down to

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examine it minutely. "Merely an abrasion of the skin?"

Dr. McCullagh smiled sarcastically, for he did not relish the interference of the Specialist. Then he said :

"Only an ordinary blister. Poor George had played several sets, and was winning easily in the final, when he was struck down. The day was abnormally hot. Over-excitement and extreme heat accounts for the apoplexy—and friction of tennis-shoe for the blister," he added with a touch of sarcasm.

McCullagh was of the old school. He decried all specialists. He also felt aggrieved, as has been indicated, that the manager of the "Royal Standard" had thought it necessary to send down Colonel Hedford to make an examination. Such a thing as foul play had not even been hinted at. Was his own certificate of death not enough? As the old doctor drove Colonel Hedford back to Torchester he pointed out the places of local interest on the way, and conversed in amiable generalities without once alluding to the object of the specialist's visit. This was the only evidence of wounded dignity which he permitted himself to show.

"The cavalry barracks," McCullagh said, pointing with his whip to a gateway flanked on either hand by two old Russian cannon which had been captured at Sevastapol.

As the sentry at the gates turned in his short walk, the bayonet on his rifle flashed in the sunlight, and his scarlet tunic stood out from the dull background of the grey old gates. Hedford noticed this once familiar sight and then remembered his promise, reluctantly given, to attend the regimental ball of the 22nd Hussars. He was glad now that he had accepted Colonel Thomson's invitation. But he did not wait for the ball to make the acquaintance of the officers. He put up at the Royal Hotel and dined at the mess of the 22nd several times before the occurrence of that great event which was creating much commotion in local society. The ladies, indeed, fairly fluttered with excitement at the delightful prospect. It was not every day they had the chance of having a German Prince for a partner, or even, as in this instance, the ghost of a chance.

During the fortnight which preceded the ball Colonel Hedford became very intimate with Lieutenant Forbes. The young officer felt flattered

by the friendship of a man so much older than himself, and one so widely distinguished. He introduced the Specialist to his whole circle of acquaintances—including Miss Helen Douglas, of the Priory. Miss Douglas had been a school-fellow of Ethel Hamilton's, and still corresponded with that fast rising, or already risen, young actress. She met Colonel Hedford, therefore, more as an old friend than a new acquaintance, and on his side the Colonel admired Miss Douglas "on sight." She was well read, well mannered, sensible and unaffected. He soon respected her as well as admired her.

Colonel Hedford was not alone in his admiration of Miss Douglas. Ffolliott and Forbes were both rivals for her affections. It seemed to be a close contest between them. In Hedford's opinion the chances were about equal. Both men had resolved to end their suspense on the night of the dance. Forbes, however, did not wait for it. He drove to the Priory the day before, and when he returned he was engaged to Miss Douglas. Honestly delighted with his triumph, he confided his secret to the junior lieutenant, Charlie Graham, and by the time the mess bugle went it was a secret no

longer. Forbes pretended to be annoyed, but his pretence was considered poor.

The magnificent band of the 22nd Hussars rang out sonorously on the still night air as Hedford stepped from his cab. The Torchester Exhibition Hall was effectively decorated, and the arrangements for electric lighting of the hall and grounds were so successful as to call for a favourable comment from the German Prince himself—and he had had some experience in the matter of illuminations. In the large conservatory the light had been subdued to that dim degree which lends potency to religious functions and charm to sentimental indulgence. It was restful to the eyes after the glare and glitter of the ball-room—not to speak of its other advantages. Outside in the Botanical Gardens crafty electrical contrivances had been wrought: the pattern of the flower-beds was traced out in lines of shimmering fire; the stems of the great trees were wound about with spirals of coloured lamps, and thousands of Chinese lanterns were festooned in long lines of flame across the broad lawn. As the *Torchester Telegraph* put it the next morning, "The fairy scene irresistibly reminded one of a page in the *Arabian Nights*."

Surgeon-Colonel Hedford strolled into the conservatory with Colonel Thomson's handsome wife on his arm. She had danced with the Prince, then with a few minor dignitaries, and lastly with her old friend Hedford.

"Let us sit here," Mrs. Thomson said, indicating a comfortable seat designed apparently for the accommodation of two persons only. They sat for some time chatting about old friends and new faces. Captain Ffolliott passed without observing them. He was evidently in search of a missing partner.

"Good gracious, Colonel Hedford," Mrs. Thomson exclaimed. "Did you see the look on Captain Ffolliott's face? He seems hard hit. Willie Forbes has cut him out, you know, with Miss Douglas. Look, there they are! What a handsome couple they make, and as good as they are good looking! Isn't she charming?"

Hedford watched them with the critical air of a man who looks on at the game of life from an uninterested stand-point.

"Time is slipping by, Colonel Hedford," Mrs. Thomson went on in a confidential voice, "and if you don't bestir yourself it will leave you behind."

"Quite so," Hedford answered. "It has left me."

"Not at all! You don't look a day older than when I saw you last; and that was ten years ago."

"Let me take you back to the ball-room," Hedford said, rising from his seat, and cutting this incorrigible match-maker short. She was encroaching upon a subject which he had always held that every individual should manage or mismanage for himself or herself. Besides, the subject was a sore one. He was not now quite sure that a life devoted to a hobby, or even to a science, is necessarily the happiest or best form of life, and he wanted to think the matter over quietly by himself.

"I see you want to shirk further discussion on the subject," Mrs. Thomson replied with resignation as she placed her arm within Hedford's. "But let me give you a woman's advice. Don't have so low an opinion of yourself so far as women are concerned. That was always a fault of yours, so my husband says, and he is right."

Hedford made no reply to this. He was thinking of a young girl who was just then winning golden opinions on the stage, who had as a child

often climbed his knee and lavished affectionate and usually sticky caresses on him who——

“Look at Mr. Forbes and Miss Douglas, Colonel Hedford,” Mrs. Thomson said, suddenly tapping him on the arm with her fan.

As the young officer and his partner swept past him, the Specialist caught sight of Captain Ffolliott standing at the door of the conservatory a few paces away. His face was livid with the exception of a crimson spot on either cheek. He was evidently labouring under suppressed excitement. A merciless expression was in his eyes. Hedford watched him curiously. So did Mrs. Thomson.

“A good officer, Robert says, but a bad man. He is greatly disliked in the regiment,” the Colonel’s wife whispered. “I am perfectly delighted that Helen Douglas refused him. They say he is drowned in debt.”

Just then Lieutenant Forbes and his partner came sweeping round the room again. It was Forbes’ first dance. He had been actively employed as one of the committee, and his duties had kept him from dancing with his *fiancée* till then. As the pair came gliding towards the Colonel’s wife and Hedford, the Specialist noticed that their

movements became slower and more languid. Forbes stopped suddenly. His face was distorted with agony. He placed his left hand on his heart. Then he fell heavily on the polished floor, dragging his partner with him in his fall.

Hedford sprang to the rescue.

"Stand back!" he cried. "Give them air."

Miss Douglas fainted. Forbes was either dead or dying.

Surgeon-Major Browne and Dr. McCullagh hurried up from the card-room.

"Take her away at once," Hedford ordered. "Don't let her see him when she returns to consciousness."

Miss Douglas was carried into the ladies' dressing-room and attended by Dr. McCullagh.

"Heart disease or apoplexy," Surgeon-Major Browne said as he removed his hand from Forbes' heart.

"Neither," whispered the Specialist in the Surgeon-Major's ear.

"Then you know what it is?"

"I believe I do."

"What is it?"

"Poison!"

"Good heavens!"

"Keep it quiet. Don't let them know. Get him into the anteroom at once."

The man, or his dead body, was removed to the anteroom, and the place quickly cleared of all but Hedford, the Surgeon-Major, and Colonel Thomson. An ambulance had been sent for. The Specialist's first proceeding was a curious one. He pulled off Forbes' shoes. Off came one shining patent-leather boot; then the other. Then Hedford drew the scarlet silk sock quickly back from the right foot. His face fell. But there was still the left sock to come off. It soon followed the other. Hedford could not suppress an exclamation of triumph, and seizing Dr. McCullagh—who at that moment entered the room—by the arm, he pointed to a well-marked abrasion of the skin visible on the sole of the left foot and said: "A mere blister! What do you think of it?"

The old doctor shook his head and looked helplessly at the Specialist.

Hedford called for brandy, and nearly half-a-pint of it was got down Forbes' throat. The body was treated as that of a drowning patient until the arrival of the ambulance. Ten minutes later it

was placed in bed in the Torchester Hospital, which was close at hand. Hedford took command, and, after two hours' hard work, the patient breathed again. But he only breathed, and no more. He was not out of danger, but Hedford had strong hopes.

The next day at twelve o'clock Surgeon-Colonel Hedford had a long interview with Colonel Thomson, the result of which was that Captain Ffolliott was detailed for special duty with a musketry squad at the rifle range. This kept him absent from his quarters for some hours. While he was away Colonel Thomson, Surgeon-Colonel Hedford, and Surgeon-Major Browne paid a visit to his room. They did not like the duty, but they could not help themselves; they had to go through with it. Hedford found what he expected. Then he and Surgeon-Major Browne retired to the laboratory attached to the A. M. D., where they met Dr. McCullagh by appointment. The laboratory was a primitive one, the Government grant being too small to provide the necessary equipment and adjuncts. But it served the Specialist's purpose. Dr. McCullagh had driven out to the Henrys' place at Langholme that morning, and, after a private

interview with the old butler—whom he bound over to secrecy—he obtained from him a small parcel. It contained a tennis-shoe, which had belonged to George Henry, deceased. Hedford had also a parcel with him. Its contents were a patent-leather boot and a red silk sock. These were the property of Lieutenant Forbes.

A general consultation now took place, and many theories were ventilated and some discussed. When Surgeon-Colonel Hedford thought that enough time had been wasted to qualify the interview to rank as an official inquiry, he arose and said coldly :

“My duty is to give Captain Ffolliott into custody on a charge of wilfully murdering George Henry, and also of attempting to murder Mr. William Tudor Forbes, senior lieutenant in the 22nd Hussars.”

“Can you prove these charges?” Colonel Thomson inquired nervously.

“Otherwise I should not make them.”

“Then for God’s sake explain. Come, John Hedford, we are old friends. You know that I will see justice done!”

“The explanation is simple enough,” the toxi-

cologist replied gravely. "I found in Ffolliott's room a deadly poison."

"What poison?" Colonel Thomson interrupted.

"Curari, or at least a preparation of it combined with prussic acid and a poison extracted from the bodies of certain venomous ants. This poison is used by the natives of British Guiana and Central America to tip their arrows with. It is readily absorbed, and is fatal in ninety-nine cases out of one hundred."

"But how could Ffolliott become possessed of such a poison?" the Colonel asked in strong excitement.

"He has a brother in Central America," Surgeon-Major Browne put in, "who is a doctor in the Government service, and was home here about a year ago. Ffolliott may have obtained the poison from him, innocently enough, so far as he was concerned."

"I find traces of the Curari combination in this tennis-shoe, which was worn by poor Henry at the Tournament. Ffolliott was in the Pavilion dressing-room that day," Hedford continued.

"But what motive?"

"In the first place, he held an assignment of

Henry's life-policy for £2,000. In the second, he is deeply in debt. The motive, if not ample, is sufficient. Then this sock which I removed from Forbes' foot last night contains enough poison to kill ten men. It is also impregnated with a preparation of a strong acid, which, in conjunction with the perspiration produced by the exercise of dancing or tennis playing would cause an excoriation of the cuticle and so admit the poison to the blood vessels."

"But how could he place it in Forbes' shoe?" Colonel Thomson broke in, hoping against hope.

"Easily enough. Their rooms are close together, and Ffolliott was seen coming out of Forbes' room just before the latter went in to dress."

"That will do," the Colonel of the 22nd said decisively. "You need go no farther. There is a possible motive in this case, which we shall not discuss."

The consultation was adjourned.

Two hours after, Colonel Thomson visited Captain Ffolliott in his room. The visit lasted only a few minutes, and must have been unsatisfactory to the visitor, for he returned from it with a puzzled look. During the afternoon, however,

the Captain's servant heard the report of firearms in his master's apartment, and on rushing in he found Ffolliott lying dead, shot through the heart. A still smoking revolver was in his right hand.

The Coroner's jury returned a verdict of accidental death.

This result did not quite fit in with Surgeon-Colonel Hedford's idea of what was due to justice, but, being a military man himself—albeit a non-combatant—he could understand Colonel Thomson's desire to preserve the honour of the 22nd Hussars, and consequently appreciated the rather meagre nature of the evidence given at the inquest.

Colonel Hedford saved the "Royal Standard" two thousand pounds. He also saved Lieutenant Forbes' life, thereby earning his very sincere gratitude and afterwards that of his wife. Forbes left the army shortly after his marriage, and the Specialist is a welcome guest at "The Priory." Mr. and Mrs. Forbes are on his special list of friends—a list which lengthens as the years go by.

There is no recognised antidote to Curari poisoning. But Hedford knows one, and in that book of his which is now approaching completion he will give it to the world.

XII.—EXEUNT OMNES.

"It's too hot for shooting. Let's rest a bit!"

Charlie Blake, a young Dublin solicitor with private means, laid his gun on the heather and sat down on a smooth rock. Surgeon-Colonel Hedford sat down beside him. Shooting grouse on a Mayo mountain, they had climbed after a pack that led them higher than was pleasant in the strong sun, shining with almost midsummer heat. Across the bay beneath their feet Muilrea towered up from the great and gloomy gorge on its eastern face. Little green patches lined the lough shore, showing where men had lived and died before "the bad times," but now only mountain sheep were grazing on them. Great gulls sailed by in stately flight. The red legs of the fast vanishing chough twinkled on the beach. A cloud covered the sun for a moment, and the weird glen across the water darkened till its intensely suggestive solitude became oppressive.

"Upon my word, I don't wonder at the

melancholy of the Celt who begins life or ends it in a wilderness like this," Blake said, to break the silence. Hedford had been watching without comment the shadows that chased each other over the mountain gorge. He merely nodded, and Blake, with half-closed eyes, continued in a dreamy voice, as if thinking aloud :

"And I don't wonder at their legends and traditions either. Why, I can see quite clearly scores of little earth-men peering at us from behind these boulders—curious little chaps, with bat-like wings and great pointed ears, and solemn eyes. And I can just hear the wail of the banshee across the lough. I understand also that the 'good people' have arranged for a dance hereabouts to-night. And the leprechaun——"

"Tillygram, sir, for his honour." A ragged urchin, who wore his trousers buttoned outside his waistcoat, interrupted Blake's dream. "His honour," of course, was Colonel Hedford, who was sharing for a fortnight the shooting-box Charlie Blake had rented for the season. The Specialist had carefully kept his temporary address a secret from all save a few close friends. The message was indirectly from one of these.

"Miss Hamilton unwell. Come at once.—
LILIAN MARSH."

The telegram had been handed in at a Dublin post-office early in the day, but it had taken some hours to reach its ultimate destination on a mountain overlooking Killery Bay. Hedford passed the telegram to Blake without a word. Charlie was one of Miss Hamilton's most ardent admirers, just as Hedford was her best friend. Blake had more money than clients, so he was able to follow Miss Hamilton about without much loss of business. It was fitting, therefore, that the ill news should be shared between these two. Blake read the telegram in silence, and handed it back. He kept his eyes turned away. It was some moments before either of the men spoke. Then Blake said:

"We can catch the night mail at Westport by hard driving. The ponies can do it."

"I am very sorry to put you to this trouble," the elder man said, looking the younger directly in the face.

"Don't mention it. I shall enjoy the drive," Blake answered as they started to scramble down the mountain side. His voice had an artificial ring of cheerfulness.

"You can trust the ponies to get us into Westport in time?"

"I can trust myself to get them there in time," Blake answered shortly.

"But it is far to drag you from your sport," Hedford went on rather breathlessly, for Charles Blake was getting down the mountain at a great pace.

"Twenty miles, is it not?"

"It's nearly two hundred."

"What, Westport?"

"No, Dublin—I have business there—I shall be glad of—of the opportunity of doing the journey in your company. Intended to tell you this morning—must have forgotten!"

"I shall be glad also," Hedford said, and dropped the subject.

Their preparations at the shooting lodge were speedily made, and Blake's tandem was ready by the time the bags were packed. On the road little conversation passed between the travellers, to the disappointment of Blake's servant, a man named Patrick, who was of a social temperament. Blake devoted himself to his tandem, taking the most out of the pair that horseflesh could stand and stay the distance. There was not a moment

to spare, and if in the first ten miles a record was not made the last five would be a race. These ponies were famous all over Connemara and they had had to justify their reputation on this journey. The long, lonely road seemed interminable in spite of the pace of the "fliers." Its loneliness became intolerable. Scarcely a bird chirped in all that wilderness. As they were rounding the mountain called "The Devil's Mother," the twilight began to deepen into night. The black ponies were now white-streaked with foam where the harness chafed their steaming coats, and the clatter of their hurrying hoofs on the dusty road was the only sound that broke the silence, while the heathy mountain tops turned purple in the afterglow of the sunken sun.

The reticence of the two men journeying together through this Connemara wilderness, each with the same feeling and fear in his heart, was altogether unyielding. Each was too proud to ask the other's sympathy. Hedford felt himself an old fogey beside the athletic, big-bodied, full-blooded youth by his side. The boy felt himself a mere nobody beside the famous Specialist. And she on whom all their thoughts were turned—whom did she favour? They smoked cigar after cigar on the

chain principle, and the ends of these burned more brightly as the daylight waned. A solitary heron standing knee-deep in a placid stream marked their coming, and, deserting his fishing ground, soared up in lazy flight. They barely noticed him. A piebald mountain hare crossed the road in front of them at speed and scudded away into the heath-covered bog; they saw it well, but did not observe it. A pewit wailed; they shivered at the dreary cry, though they hardly heard it.

At last Croagh Patrick could be seen in the fast-falling darkness. The ponies were pumped out, but there was still almost time to catch the train, and the game little animals raced on with pace unchecked, though now in sore distress. They were also encumbered by belated market-people who see-sawed their vehicles across the road stupidly, and who were surprised at the heartiness wherewith Blake cursed them. Hedford's mood was certainly not closely observant, and the light was not good, but he could not but observe the incongruous appearance of many of the young women riding pillion-fashion behind their male relatives and wearing high-heeled shoes and kid gloves. A black-haired, red-cheeked, barefooted colleen

riding so and swinging her brown ankles cheerfully is all very well in her way, but the other combination——

“We have caught the train,” Blake exclaimed when still a mile from Westport. “I will ease them now.”

“They deserve it,” Hedford said with a jerk like that of a man suddenly aroused from sleep.

The long night ride in the train was passed without sleep. Hedford and Blake secured a compartment to themselves, and so were able to lie down. Blake closed his eyes and pretended to sleep, but Hedford remained wide awake. He never ceased puffing at his cigars. It was a miserable journey. It was over at last, or nearly over. The train slowed down and then stopped. Blake seemed afraid to leave the carriage. The first porter would surely blurt out the worst news in his face. The cabmen would pity him. Curiously enough, the white-haired Specialist himself felt something of the same emotion. But his business in life had been to act rather than to analyze his motives for action. He stepped out of the carriage briskly. Blake followed with humility. They drove rapidly to the Shelbourne, and, leaving

their luggage there, went on to Miss Hamilton's address.

The landlady was in despair. Her lodger was very ill. Two doctors had visited the patient and held a consultation without definite result as to any certain diagnosis. The usual symptoms of nervous exhaustion from overwork were present, but there were other symptoms not so easily classified. Insanity had been gravely considered and discarded, like many other theories. Meanwhile, both the doctors and their patient, when she was conscious, waited anxiously for the arrival of the Specialist, the doctors principally because of the morbid importance their patient appeared to place on it. Anything that served to soothe her hysterical condition would be welcome, even if presented in the person of a man whose many breaches of professional etiquette had been such that they were bound to treat him with suspicion, if not with contempt.

Miss Lilian Marsh, who had telegraphed to Hedford, was in charge of the sick room. She was Ethel Hamilton's understudy, and was nearly worn out by her dual duties of taking Miss Hamilton's place at the theatre by night and a

place at her bedside by day. The patient earnestly objected, but Miss Marsh was firm. She would not allow any other amateur to assist the nurse whom the doctors had sent. The nurse at the moment was out for a breath of air, and Miss Marsh was consequently on duty. Colonel Hedford was shown at once into the sick room. Charlie Blake sat in the parlour on the ground-floor, stared out of the window, and waited alone and in misery for the verdict. He had a bad time while waiting in that parlour, but he must be left there for the present.

Miss Marsh arose hastily when Hedford was announced, and came forward to say that Ethel was asleep. She was very nervous. She appeared to be nearly as hysterical as the patient had been reported to be. Hedford endeavoured to reassure the trembling girl, but without much result. She could not steady her voice. Her hands twitched. She burst into tears. Hedford thought her anxiety for her friend overdone, but he gave no sign of his suspicion. He waited quietly for her self-confidence to return, preserving that air of unaffected respect he always maintained in the presence of ladies—of all women.

Miss Marsh at last mastered her emotion by a strong effort, and then in a low voice detailed the patient's symptoms, not in any connected narrative, but in answer to leading questions put by the Specialist. When the story was told, the girl turned abruptly to Hedford and seemed about to make some sort of confession. But she broke down ere she had begun it. Her eyes were wild. They avoided the steady glance of this most gentle man. She could not do it—whatever it was she had meant to attempt.

"Here is the nurse," Miss Marsh exclaimed with a note of despair in her voice. "I must go now to prepare for the theatre. There is a *matinée* performance to-day. Will you, you seem very kind—will you do a great service to a woman in distress?"

"I think I may say that my sympathy for any one"—he did not say "any woman"—"in distress is not far to seek," Hedford replied somewhat coldly. "Indeed, that circumstance keeps me rather busy—in other people's affairs."

"Then don't believe what she," glancing at the bed, "says when she is hysterical. We are rivals, you know, artistic rivals. I am afraid we were

rather jealous of each other. Such estrangements arise sometimes in the profession, as you may be aware." The girl said this harshly. "And she talks a lot of nonsense when she is off her head. You understand?"

"Oh, yes! I quite understand," Hedford said reassuringly. And then, as it were thoughtlessly, he added: "You may feel certain I shall not believe anything against you—without good grounds."

Miss Marsh left the room without a word. She closed the door softly, so as to leave the sleeper undisturbed. Hedford followed her to the corridor. She turned, and asked passionately:

"What do you want? Why do you follow me?"

"Merely to see you out. There is no one else about. It is a trivial courtesy."

"Then dispense with it. I can see myself out. And allow me to withdraw a stupid appeal I made to you. Believe what you like of me, and keep your sympathy till I ask for it again."

Despite this fierce speech Hedford preceded her down the steep stairs, and, opening the street door, bowed her out politely.

"I am sorry," he said, as the girl was passing

out, "if I have wounded you inadvertently, and my offer of sympathy or help remains—to be had for the asking."

"It will never be asked by me," Miss Marsh said in a hard voice as she turned away.

"Then it may chance to be given without the asking," Colonel Hedford said calmly, almost carelessly.

When Ethel Hamilton awoke from her fevered sleep and found her steadfast friend by her bedside, a cry of relief broke from her dry lips.

"Is there anyone in the room? I mean anyone but you?"

"Only the nurse."

"Send her away. Send her out of the room."

Hedford spoke to the nurse and she left the room. When she was gone, the apparently dying girl raised her head from the pillow and said hoarsely:

"I am dying, and Lilian Marsh has poisoned me!"

"I thought so," Hedford agreed, in the soothing voice one would use with a wilful or ailing child.

"But I know it," the girl moaned, as she sank back exhausted by even this slight effort.

"So do I, but I have given you in this"—he held up a graduated medicine glass—"an antidote which will make you well. I"—he was exaggerating, but he could not help himself—"I know what she gave you, and I know what will cure you."

"I knew that you would understand. You remember my father's case. It has preyed on my mind."

"It has," said Hedford, "it has preyed too much on it. And now we are going to lay that spectre which has caused you to dream foolish dreams—why do you suspect Miss Marsh?"

The last clause was spoken sharply, so that the attention of the invalid might be concentrated and the feeble brain power left to her be focussed on it. Her answer was rather startling.

"Because I saw her put the six sulphonal powders the doctor prescribed to last a week—I have been nearly mad with insomnia—into a glass and fill it out with water. Then she made me drink the whole of it."

"Made you drink?"

"Yes, made me. She can make me do anything now. I am so weak."

"You told the doctors this?"

"No, only you. The others say I am mad. If I told them this they would swear it." The girl fell back again exhausted. Hedford called in the nurse and gave her some suitable instructions, and took upon himself to prescribe a harmless restorative. Then he released Charlie Blake from his long and miserable wait in the parlour below. When they were out in the street Blake asked nervously :

"Is she very ill?"

"Bad enough. But complete rest will bring her round."

"Thank God!"

"And now," said Hedford, "I must leave you. You had better go straight to the Shelbourne, and wait till I get there. I have an interview, without previous arrangement, to bring off, and it may take me some time."

"Has it anything to do with her?"

"Well, indirectly—yes! Good-bye for the present."

Miss Lilian Marsh refused point-blank to receive Surgeon-Colonel Hedford when his card was handed to her. As that person himself, however, was already in the room, there was no alternative but

to endure the visit. The visitor introduced his business without delay, explaining in a word that he had just dropped in on his way to the nearest magistrate to swear an information charging one, Lilian Marsh, with attempting to murder Ethel Hamilton. He added that he would be glad to hear if Miss Marsh had any remarks to make before he proceeded further in the matter. The girl nearly fainted, but she controlled her emotion by a desperate effort. A minute or two elapsed ere she could speak.

Hedford used the interval to say quietly :
"Please remember that if Miss Hamilton's statement had been made to the doctors attending her instead of to me, the first you would have heard of it would have been from the constable who arrested you."

"Then I will tell you all—all I tried to say to you to-day, and should have said. I think you will believe me. You will believe me, for I shall tell you the truth, the whole truth ; and is it likely that a girl like me could impose a lie upon a man like you? "

"Candidly, it is rather unlikely," Hedford admitted blandly.

"I nursed her loyally," Miss Marsh continued, "just because our little professional jealousies had made us sometimes rather unfair to each other, and I wanted to atone for any faults on my side. I know she would have done the same for me. On Tuesday night, however, I was worn out, and I fell asleep and had a dreadful dream. I dreamed that I was giving her the sleeping draught, and that something I could not resist compelled me to empty the whole week's supply into the tumbler, and she drank it; and a voice said to me: 'You shall play Ophelia now;' and there was a lot more of the hideous nightmare, and when I awoke Ethel Hamilton seemed to be dead, and—God help me!—all the six powder papers were empty. The doctors were surprised at such extreme lethargy following hysteria. If I had any doubt as to the origin of the 'complications' in Miss Hamilton's case it has been removed. The first time she was able to speak she accused me of poisoning her, and described accurately though incoherently every incident in my dream. I telegraphed to you because she threatened that unless I did so she would tell the doctors. Now, Colonel Hedford, that is the whole truth, you won't—you won't inform on me?"

"Oh, no—not at all; because I believe your story. Miss Hamilton, indeed, has already told me the salient features of it. Before she did so, however, I suspected that she was suffering from sulphonal poisoning, but, of course, it was a revelation to learn how it had been administered. How did you account for the missing powders?"

"I was desperate, and afraid of being tried for my life. I had another batch made up by the same chemist."

"By the way, do you know what strength they were, these powders?"

"Yes, fifteen grains each."

"Good heavens! Ninety grains of sulphonal for a weak girl. It is no wonder she is thoroughly stupefied."

When Hedford was taking his leave he assured Miss Marsh she need not now fear for the fate of the victim whose life she had nearly taken. And he was thanked with so much gratitude that he felt genuinely sorry for this utterly friendless girl who had found herself in a position of serious peril without a single adviser. She asked him if he had really suspected her, admitting that her manner must have seemed suspicious.

"Yes," said Hedford, "that's just the reason I never suspected you for a moment of any evil purpose. Your manner was so undisguisedly suspicious. Poor child, you would make a poor rogue, however good an actress you may be on the stage. The rascal in real life wants more than histrionic ability—he or she wants rascality."

Thus Miss Marsh was not arrested for attempted murder, and Miss Hamilton recovered speedily under the confidence Colonel Hedford's presence inspired. Ophelia was played by Lilian Marsh till the end of the tour with advantage to herself and the management. Hedford returned to Salchester as soon as his patient was convalescent, and Blake soon after ran over on a short visit. The shooting in Mayo was not altogether finished, but Salchester was within easy distance of London, where Miss Hamilton was now playing a light part. So Blake was content to forego the remainder of the season's sport whereto his prepaid rent entitled him.

One evening in Hedford's study, when the host and his guest were smoking cigars and sampling a special brand of Irish whisky Blake had brought over, the guest said lazily :

"About this craze of yours, Hedford, this quasi-detective business: do you find it pays?"

"It pays well enough—sometimes. But I have not followed it altogether for payment."

"For amusement?"

"Not altogether."

"For what, then?"

"A little of both, and a great deal of something else."

"And the something else is?"

"That, I fear, you would not quite understand. But I'll go on as if I thought you would. It is the cause which obliges the average man to do his duty without knowing why he does it; the satisfaction of the altruistic instinct which is just as natural, and vastly more beneficent, than the egoistic instinct."

"Put in smaller change, please. I am not well posted in the phraseology of these new, high-falutin' fads," Blake said lazily, flicking the ash of his cigar.

"All new ideas are considered high-falutin' fads by human fossils—pardon me." Hedford was nettled.

"Rough on me, but no matter. Go on." Blake

stretched out his legs and spread his hands before the cheerful blaze of the study fire. "Seems to me," he continued, "a man must look out for himself even in the highest form of civilisation. There is a line to be drawn somewhere, surely."

"There is a line to be drawn, and it should be drawn through that point which leaves fools on one side and knaves on the other. The trouble is that even yet the knaves have it all their own way, and men of less egoistic instincts must rank with the fools or be unclassified—that is, average men. Of course, philanthropy on a grand scale may gain a man some credit, and philosophy does not land him immediately in gaol or on the scaffold, as it did five centuries ago; but it is still a troublesome thing to go about the world with. By-and-by it will be less of a nuisance to its professor and more of a credential——"

"Come in!"

Chundra-Dass opened the door, salaamed, and said:

"Lady, sahib—must see you—most important."

Ethel Hamilton entered the room. She stopped short on seeing Blake, and stammered something

unintelligible. The men arose, and Colonel Hedford offered his visitor a chair. She did not appear to notice it, but remained standing.

"I was passing through on my way to town after a short holiday. I found that I could get a late train on this night in the week. I wanted to see you about—about my health. Miss Plymouth thought it would be wise. We are stopping at the Royal. So I just called. I had no idea of seeing you, Mr. Blake."

Blake muttered a few commonplaces, and then, pulling out his watch, remarked that he had just time to go to the post-office to see if any letters or telegrams had arrived for him. After he left the room they talked on trivial subjects for some time. Ethel Hamilton was then silent for a minute. It was with a strong effort that she said steadily :

"I have heard by chance that you are going back to India? "

"Not exactly to India."

"Oh, well, to the East. And I could not let you go without wishing you good-bye, and—does *he* know? "

"No, I don't think I have mentioned it to him."

There was a long pause. The girl spoke again, this time very steadily and without effort.

"You saved my life. That is only the least of the many services you have done me. You are going away for ever. I do not wish you to go."

"Thank you. I am sure you do not wish it. But I must go."

"Even if I—if I—wish you to remain?"

"Yes," said Hedford decisively. "For that reason if for none else. Dear girl, why should we—you and I—talk like strangers. I would not accept the sacrifice. I have devoted my life to a branch of science. I will not offer you—I will not permit you to accept out of gratitude and generosity—the poor remnant of that life which is left." He bent down and kissed her forehead gently, and said "Good-bye!"

Blake was standing at the door. They had not heard it open. He glared at them. The girl took both of Hedford's hands in hers and whispered with a sob "Good-bye! God bless you!" She passed Blake without a glance, much less a word.

"So this is your altruistic philosophy, most wise professor—a girl that I was as good as engaged to!" Blake said in a low, bitter voice.

"I hope you are good enough to be engaged to her," Hedford replied drily.

Blake began again fiercely, but Hedford silenced him with a gesture. "Listen to me, boy, before you say anything you should be sorry for. That girl would have—well, would have married me, old as I am, from gratitude. I could not permit that. I prefer that she should marry you for—what is called love at your time of life.

Surgeon-Colonel Hedford was smoking one of his strong cigars in the room which had been his studio. It was partly dismantled, but still recognisable as the sanctum of a scholar. He looked round the familiar room with saddened eyes. Many a secret of science he had therein mastered; many a pleasant hour of calm, philosophic thought he had therein enjoyed. And he was leaving it all to bury himself once more in the East—for the sake of science? Not at all! Because a girl liked him, but loved another man. And all his science: what did it count for now? An object in life? No, only a resource. And his philosophy? A poor alternative!

It was rather pathetic.

"Carriage ready, sahib," Chundra-Dass said softly.

Surgeon-Colonel Hedford threw away his half-smoked cigar, saying :

"And I am ready."

THE END.



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